

1994

## MATHEWSON STREET URBAN DESIGN THEME DEVELOPMENT

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*University of Rhode Island*

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MATHEWSON STREET URBAN DESIGN THEME DEVELOPMENT

BY

JAMES TAYLOR

A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF COMMUNITY PLANNING

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

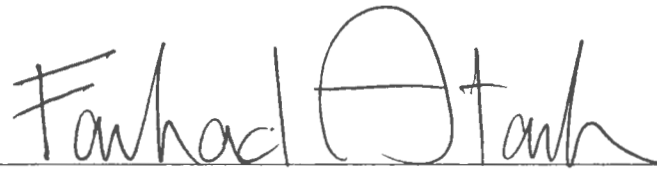
1994

MASTER OF COMMUNITY PLANNING

RESEARCH PROJECT

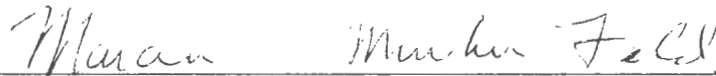
OF

JAMES TAYLOR

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Farhad Atash". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "A".

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Approved: Major Professor Dr. Farhad Atash

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Marcia Marker Feld". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "M".

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Acknowledged: Director Dr. Marcia Marker Feld

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## I - Introduction

Downtown Providence is rich in historic character. This character, in conjunction with the urban experience Providence has to offer, could be better utilized to attract more people. Careful development of these resources would economically stabilize the City and enhance its urban environment. At this writing, April 1993, the Providence Convention Center nears completion, greater regional and national visibility for the City lie in the future. This opportunity, will give Providence a chance to attract new users. However, efforts must be made to improve the present urban experience to ensure success.

Urban Designer, Andres Duany, has recently noted the importance of the City's existing historic qualities as an important resource;

"There are streets worthy of London and Boston

There is wonderful detail and innovative

vigorous architecture... There are many places in the United States that have grown into cities that do not have this quality. This place was intended by your ancestors to be a great city."<sup>1</sup>

To make the most of these opportunities, careful planning and appropriate design solutions are needed to help attract people to Providence. While some proposals will set policy, intended to unify City progress, others will be physically oriented with a geographic focus. The latter projects are to become part of the City's landscape that will link focal points, provide support for users and perhaps become attractions in themselves. It is the intent of any physical design proposal to provide an environment that is inviting to the user for reasons of both aesthetics and ease of use;

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<sup>1</sup> Andres Duany, *Downcity Providence - A Master Plan for a Special Time*. (Miami, FL: Andres Duany and Elizabeth-Plater Zyberk Town Planners, Draft - March 1992), 2.

"We manipulate environment to make it easier for people to do the things they want to do or give them new opportunities for action. Environment is an intimate part of human behavior. The setting along with the institutions and the concepts of the actors, organizes the standing pattern of activity..."<sup>2</sup>

Proposals intended to provide new use areas along with pleasing aesthetics are best packaged as a design theme. A theme would be a unified effort of urban design and planned street activities focused in a particular area.

An urban design theme developed with a specific purpose and for a defined area should have several features: A theme would consider physical characteristics and attractions outside the theme area; A theme should be historically consistent, and educate

users, of cultural and aesthetic heritage; A theme would promote the development of entertainment and activities most appropriate to the intended users; A theme would also include ongoing, consistent maintenance of private and public spaces in the theme area. Due to the diversity of those involved in a theme, funding can be creatively attained and applied. It may be necessary to implement a theme in several phases. Theme development can be a concentrated effort at a single location that can act as a nucleus for the spread of future urban improvements.

Mathewson Street has been identified as a premier location in Andres Duany's plan *Downtown Providence, Master Plan for a Special Time*. Duany's response is related to Mathewson Street's location as a key connection between the Convention Center, Westminster Street and The Providence Performing Arts Center (PPAC):

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<sup>2</sup> Kevin Lynch, Site Planning, 2nd ed., (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979) 25.

"Give Mathewson Street special streetscape and development attention to encourage pedestrian traffic from the Convention Center to the PPAC area. Restaurants, sidewalk cafes and art-related retail will draw people toward Westminster Street."<sup>3</sup>

The DOWNCITY report emphasizes of the ideal architectural style and scale in the vicinity of Mathewson Street. Duany also stresses the urgency of making efforts to attract and accommodate the Convention Center:

"If it is not to be a disaster, the Convention Center and the downtown must be integrally linked. When you design a convention center, do you not resolve the parking? Do you not resolve the highway connections? Do you not design the landscaping? Well, you must also

resolve the downtown which is its setting. Providence has no choice."<sup>4</sup>

### 1.2 A Design Theme for Mathewson Street

The DOWNCITY Plan implies that Mathewson Street is in need of an urban design theme. It is argued by many, that the success of a convention center is not only dependent upon facility itself but also the quality and appeal of the city in which it is located. Mathewson Street is the key linkage between the Convention Center and downtown. Hence, a Mathewson Street Theme is likely to be the first experience for the convention delegate. With this in mind, a positive urban experience on Mathewson Street will enhance the image of Providence and inspire future convention activity. This will bring new and continued prosperity to the City.

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Kohler, Consultant Report, in *Downcity Providence - A Master Plan for a Special Time*. 4.

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<sup>4</sup> Duany, *Downcity Providence*, 3.



An urban design theme on Mathewson Street should consider these existing characteristics. Mathewson Street is already rich in architectural character. Buildings are Victorian style with excellent individual details. The Street width is about fifty feet and building height averages three to five stories which affords ideal human scale. This should be accentuated with the development of an aesthetically pleasing and appropriate streetscape design.

It is probable that the theme can best promote economic revitalization through utilization of current cultural resources (i.e. existing arts, entertainment and academic resources) to attract and accommodate new markets. Existing and future retail activities could then be encouraged and supported.

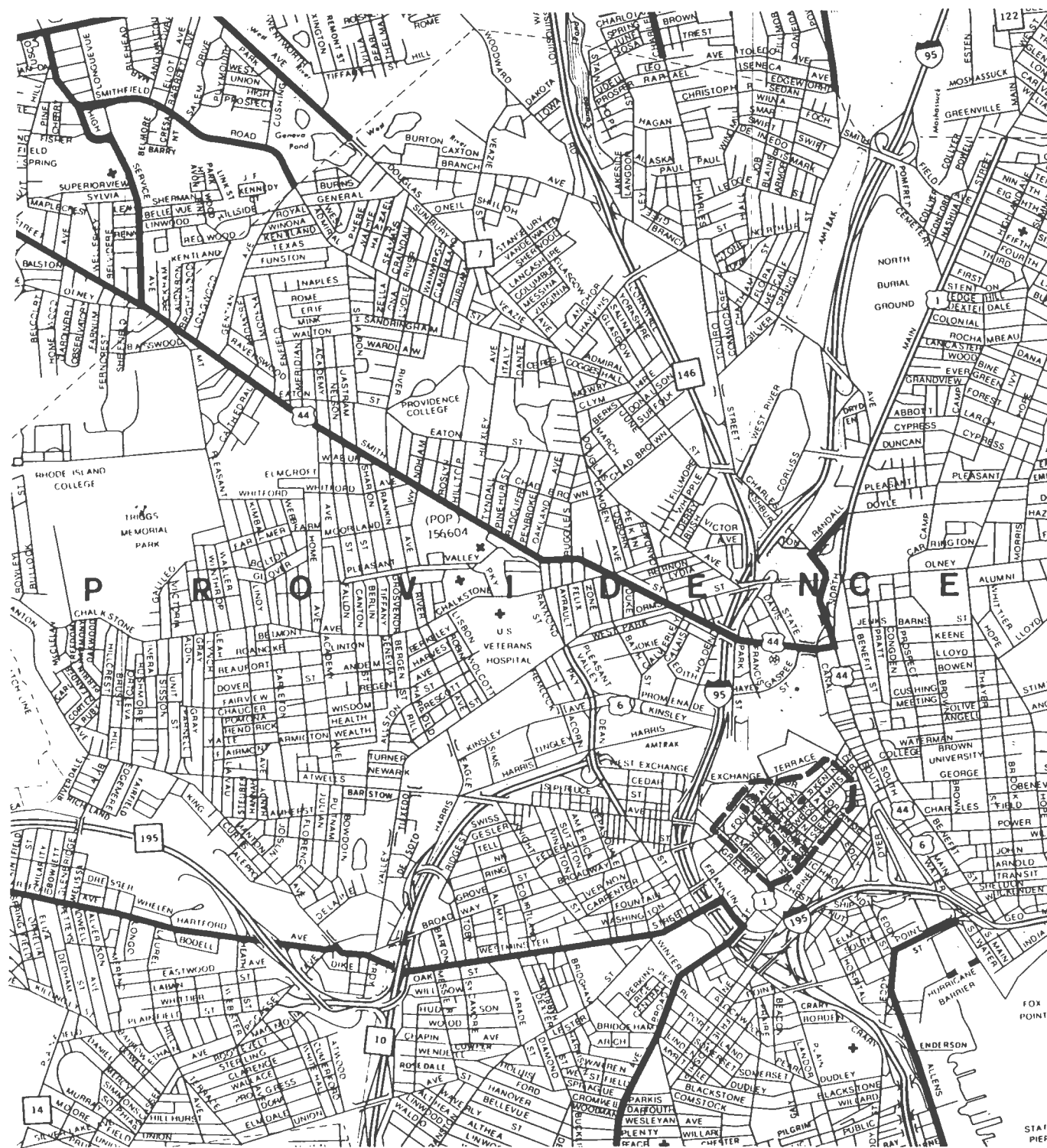
The theme should also develop solutions to issues of safety and maintenance. Solutions here can be built into programs administered by tenants within the theme area.

The Mathewson Street theme should be developed to provide linkage to surrounding activities. This connection will inspire prosperity in other areas.

### 1.3 Mathewson Street in a Downtown Context

Mathewson Street is about four blocks long and it bisects the city's Downtown (see Figure 1.1). The Downtown area, in this study, is bounded by Kennedy Plaza and Sabin Street to the North, Empire Street to the West, Weybosset Street to the South and Dyer Street to the East. This boundary roughly follows local street pattern that encircles the center of Downtown Providence.

Mathewson Street is located in the more historic area of Downtown and, with few exceptions, exemplary Victorian architecture runs the entire length of the Street. Each building is architecturally unique yet



## Legend

- Historic Downtown
- Study Area

## Mathewson Street Theme Development

## Downtown Locus

A Study by James Taylor at The University of Rhode Island, Graduate Curriculum in Community Planning and Area Development

SUMMER 1994



Scale 1" = 1/2 Mile



Figure : 1.1

similar scale and level of detail provides an interesting and harmonious urban environment.

At the Northwest end of Mathewson Street lies the Providence Convention Center. The Convention Center represents a significant effort to attract new users into the City. Pedestrian connection from the Center to downtown is currently weak due to fast moving traffic on Fountain and Sabin Streets as well as the abandonment of the Mathewson Street right of way in this area.

The Providence Performing Arts Center is located across Weybosset Street at the Southeast end of Mathewson Street. Cultural events at this facility are a regional draw that could be further enhanced by a theme on Mathewson Street.

Mathewson Street intersects Westminster Street which is considered by many to be a keystone in downtown retail activity and it has received considerable urban design attention in the past. The

crossing of Mathewson and Westminster Streets is to be further enhanced by the construction of a small urban park on the site of four small buildings that are inconsistent with local character. This urban park will be a centerpiece for the downtown.

Washington and Weybosset Streets are parallel to Westminster Street on either side and also intersect Mathewson Street. Washington and Weybosset Streets have also received some streetscape attention in the past. The design of each street has been individual and results are not consistent. Mathewson Street must seek to compliment and unify the overall character of each street.

The study area, shown in Figure 1.2, encompasses the entire length of the Mathewson Street right of way from Sabin Street, in front of the Providence Convention Center, to Weybosset Street, in front of the Providence Performing Arts Center. The width of the study area is generally one building lot



deep on both sides of Mathewson Street to facilitate study of vacant land and building uses that are adjacent to the Street. Exceptions to the study area width are between Fountain and Sabin Streets and in the vicinity of proposed Grace Park.

#### 1.4 Goals and Objectives of this Study

The goal of this study is to recommend an urban design theme for Mathewson Street that is intended to establish and promote economic stability in a safe and aesthetically pleasing urban environment. This is to be accomplished through the fulfillment of three objectives.

First, is to find an understanding of existing cultural resources in the City of Providence that can be applied to Mathewson Street. Cultural resources include the history and characteristics of the City that have shaped the downtown. This will provide the

basis for a theme that will be consistent with the existing character.

Second, is the identification of elements that will guide the theme during its conception as well as after its implementation. These elements include the people who will influence and be affected by the theme as well as ordinances and documentation specific to the City that will have an affect on the theme.

The third objective involves physical inventory, analysis and design of the study area. This process involves familiarization with Mathewson Street, from an urban design perspective. This will provide insight as to the form that the theme will have.

Each of these objectives will shape the development of the Mathewson Street Theme. While the first two objectives, cultural resources and guiding elements, will give the theme its meaning, the third objective, physical characteristics will provide the

place for the theme. It is also the intent of this study to propose strategies to implement the theme.

### 1.5 Methodology of the Study

Methodology of this study will rely on three basic processes. The first is a review of literature relevant to the study. Andres Duany's *Downtown Providence - a Master Plan for a Special Time* is a key document that provides a basis for the undertaking of this study. Duany makes many statements that recognize the potential of Providence. The Mathewson Street Theme Development Study seeks a conclusion to just one of Duany's findings.

This author has also familiarized himself with a number of previous plans executed for Providence (see bibliography) to gain insight on past goals of the City. Historic surveys and reports have been used for a deeper understanding of the physical development of

the City of Providence. Academic texts have been utilized for a more theoretical understanding of thematic development as well as for the development of the urban design analysis of this study.

The second process involves key informant interviews. This includes interviews with organization leaders and representatives of interest groups. The unique value of the interview is best explained here:

"Interviews are very effective for gathering qualitative information. These tend to be quite conversational in tone. The researcher may have some ideas what he or she thinks may be important areas of investigation and can query the respondent in a loose exploratory manner. Interviews used to elicit qualitative information are generally open-ended to allow the researcher the freedom to pursue topics that surface as important during the conversation itself or from observation of the person's

environment, dress, and speech, and other behaviors."<sup>5</sup>

The above method has been closely followed to best discover opinions, needs and potentials of those that would be closely involved with the Mathewson Street Theme. Anonymity of specific statements have been maintained for the sake of candor.

The third process involves site reconnaissance, inventory and urban design analysis. Site familiarity is important in the development of a design theme that relates to the physical environment.

"Site reconnaissance is usually done to get an initial body of first hand information, both qualitative and quantitative, about a problem. However, the opportunity to collect qualitative information is a particular strength of site reconnaissance."<sup>6</sup>

Qualitative information, such as sights and sounds experienced in the study area, are of extreme importance to theme development. The preservation and enhancement of positive qualitative elements is likely to add a greater depth of character to a new urban design theme.

Site reconnaissance will also provide quantitative information that are useful in the comprehensive study area inventory. Information such as building style, use and size as well as street characteristics and openspace uses comprise the inventory.

Findings of the inventory will lay the groundwork for the urban design analysis, using figure-ground and linkage-node methods. The analysis will identify positive and negative characteristics that should be considered in theme development.

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony J. Catanese, Urban Planning, 2nd ed., (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1988), 83.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 81.

## 1.6 Organization of the Study

This study is presented in seven chapters. Chapters are sequenced to first provide background and technical data, then describe the proposed theme and finally discuss possible implementation strategies. Graphic support is incorporated so as to more fully convey concepts and proposals

Chapter 2 consists of a discussion of downtown Providence and its cultural resources. The academic presence in the City of Providence has been inventoried. Institutions of higher education can be a powerful catalyst to stabilize and enhance an urban environment through cultural enrichment and increased activities. Providence has a considerable artisan population that represents a considerable asset in the development of a positive urban environment. Architectural heritage of downtown Providence is also an asset. A consistent framework of Victorian

structures and scale has remained largely intact and sensitive treatment of this element could have far reaching positive results.

Chapter 3 is an inventory and analysis of the physical characteristics found on Mathewson Street. Information regarding existing conditions are collected and then analyzed using accepted urban design methods.

Chapter 4 discusses the planning environment that affects theme development. This involves an analysis of stakeholders involved with the development of a Mathewson Street theme. Then, potential retail markets for a Mathewson Street theme are examined. Applicability of the existing urban design guidelines for the City of Providence are discussed in this Chapter. Relevant portions of the Downcity Implementation Plan are also examined.

Chapter 5 presents the urban design theme that has been developed using goals and objectives



that have been determined in the previous chapters. Potential building/land use alternatives, linkages, management/activities programs and amenities are discussed. General guidelines as well as site specific proposals are presented

Chapter 6 recommends strategies for implementation. This chapter identifies potential funding sources to implement the theme. Moreover, this Chapter outlines a phased implementation scenario.

Chapter 7 summarizes major concepts of the Mathewson Street Urban Design Theme proposal. Important features, potentials and possible future conditions are highlighted.



*The Lederer and The Squire Bdgs.*

## II - The City of Providence

*This chapter provides a brief overview of the development of the Providence downtown core as it relates to Mathewson Street. Key resources found in the City appropriate to theme development, primarily historic resources, presence of academic institutions and the arts are also presented.*

### 2.1 Historic Background of Downtown Providence

The City of Providence was founded on the East side of the confluence of the Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket Rivers, on Narragansett Bay, in the mid-Seventeenth Century. Original daily activities were those that supported agriculture. During the Eighteenth Century Providence grew into a seaport, trading with other colonies, England, The West Indies and Africa. New residences, warehouses businesses

and public buildings were built on the West side of the rivers where the downtown is now located.

Providence became Rhode Islands 'first city' as a result of the mass destruction of Newport during the Revolutionary War. Providence was recognized as a centrally located hub for all modes of transportation. Port facilities expanded further South to accommodate larger ships. Business activities remained in their established location at the confluence of the Rivers. Just before 1800 the manufacture of cotton textile had begun in Providence.<sup>1</sup>

With the industrial revolution established, investment shifted from trade to industry and Providence developed a skilled labor pool that enabled manufacturing to rise to the forefront of local economic activity. This was further augmented by

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<sup>1</sup> Wm McKenzie Woodward and Edward F. Sanderson, Providence A Citywide Survey of Historic Resources (Providence, RI: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1986), 41.

improvements in overland transportation, particularly the railroad. The City was, and still is, a viable shipping port, but the importance of the downtown's proximity to the water diminished, as evidenced by the covering of its rivers by new buildings and roadways. Figure 2.1 shows the layout of the City of Providence in 1850.

The development of the City's downtown progressed to accommodate the banking and business aspects of industry and to provide retail support to the local workforce. By the turn of the Twentieth Century, Providence had grown to become a leader in tools, metals and jewelry manufacturing.

On several downtown streets, the urban pattern established in the late 1800's has remained largely unchanged. Many buildings that now stand in the downtown area were built after 1860 and before 1920. The pace of new construction in the downtown slowed

after 1920 as industry moved to other parts of the country.<sup>2</sup>

The downtown core has remained well defined, at the foot of College Hill and Federal Hill. As regional transportation evolved, the downtown became further enclosed by railroad lines and then the interstate highway system. These physical barriers limited further growth of the downtown creating a compact walkable urban environment.

#### *The History of Mathewson Street*

The Mathewson Street area was first developed on lands known as Mathewson Farm. Mathewson had become involved in jewelry manufacturing. In the 1750s the farm was purchased for development. It is indicated that the early construction was a mix of

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<sup>2</sup> Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Downtown Providence, Statewide Historical Preservation Report P-P-5 (Providence, RI: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1981), 16.



housing, some retail businesses and small industries. The path eventually to be known as Mathewson Street, was first called School Street from Westminster Street South, because of a school house that stood near the intersection of Chapel and Mathewson Streets. North of Westminster Street, the path was known as Furnace Lane, due to a forge located nearby. In 1807, both streets were renamed Mathewson Street in commemoration of the original property owners.<sup>3</sup>

Although the urban pattern had been set early on, Mathewson Street did not attain the urban character it now has, until the last two decades of the Nineteenth Century (see Figure 2.2). Present day Mathewson Street retains mostly the same character that it had 100 years ago. Most buildings are three to seven stories tall and are rich in Victorian detail.

Local historians consider that the Rialto Theater, at 119-127 Mathewson Street, is the oldest

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 12.


structure on the street (c. 1829), but extensive turn of the century replacement of front and rear walls, have changed the structure drastically. Grace Episcopal Church (c. 1845) at 175 Mathewson Street, is the oldest largely intact structure on the Street, however it too, has undergone some renovation over time. Its Gothic Revival spires and gables complement the existing Street character. All other buildings on Mathewson Street are Victorian commercial structures built between 1885 and 1915 with the exception of the building at #301 Westminster Street which is on the site of the proposed Grace Park.<sup>4</sup> Buildings currently standing along Mathewson Street were, in most cases, erected to replace previously existing wood-frame structures that had been adapted to meet commercial needs.

With the exception of street level facade renovations and the burying of utility lines in the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 13.



  
Mathewson Street  
Theme Development

Early postcards of Mathewson Street,  
approximately 1905.

Source: Rhode Island  
Historical Society.  
Figure: 2.2

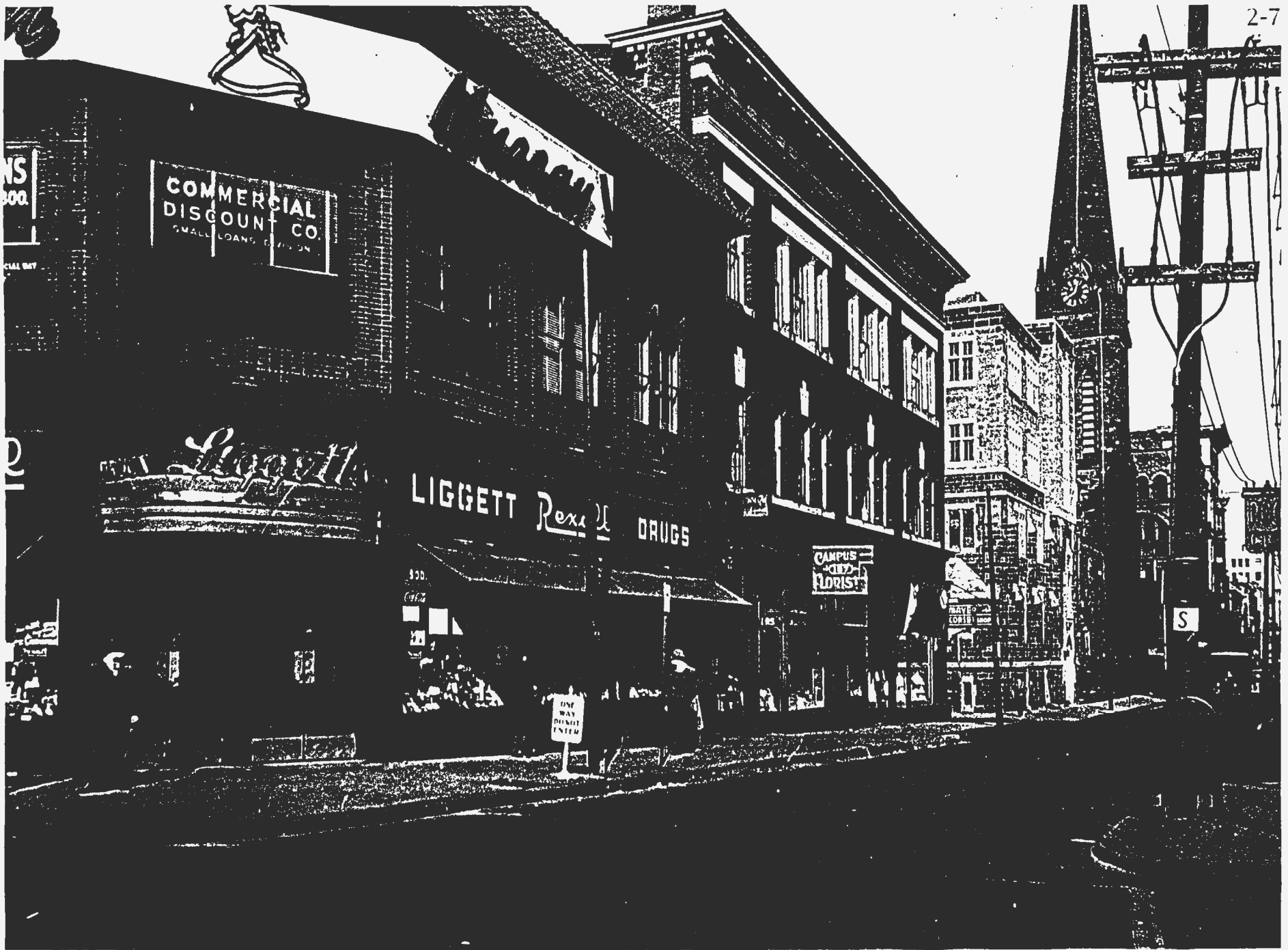
Twentieth Century, there has been little change in the urban character along Mathewson Street (see Figures 2.3 and 2.4). Preservation of historic character is partially due to the slow pace of economic progress in the downtown between the 1920s and the 1950s. Urban renewal of the 1960s and 1970s was focused mainly on the clearance of slums to the West of downtown. The late 1970s and 1980s brought interest in the rehabilitation and reuse of existing structures.

## 2.2 The Academic Environment in Providence

The academic presence in a city can be viewed as a strong resource in three different ways. First, the student body represents a nontraditional segment of the population. Student activity hours are varied and they are unlike those of typical working hours. A mix of student and worker activities, extends hours of street vitality. Student activities serve to enrich and

diversify cultural activities. Entertainment and support services of student life has the tendency to draw individuals from outside academic circles. An example of this can be seen any evening at Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts. These elements of the academic environment stabilize and enhance day to day vitality.

Second, the 'college town' image can make a municipality more attractive to business. Colleges and universities, especially when clustered together, have the ability to attract profitable events and business activity on a larger scale. Interview sources have explained that academic institutions are able to respond differently than business entities to economic fluctuations. The inflow of tuition and grant money is not necessarily reflective of local economics. An institution that is philanthropic in nature may be



Mathewson Street  
Theme Development

Mathewson Street looking West from  
Weybosset Street, 1951.

Source: Rhode Island  
Historical Society.  
Figure: 2.3





Mathewson Street  
Theme Development

Mathewson Street looking East from  
Washington Street, 1951.

Source: Rhode Island  
Historical Society.  
Figure: 2.4

interested in public improvement and be willing to provide some funds as well as support for revitalization activities.

Third, academic institutions are good sources for the execution of studies, services and other public interest projects. Services needed by a municipality (i.e. design, management, hospitality, public art, etc.) can be provided by an institution at little cost while providing valuable hands-on experience to involved students. Additionally, activities of this nature have the power to build strong positive bonds between the municipality, the institution and the public.

In the Providence area there are eight private and three public colleges and universities. In the City proper three renown universities and a number of smaller institutions of higher education are based. Several Rhode Island based colleges and universities hold extension classes in the City. The City of

Providence's stature as a small city also make it an ideal laboratory in which to conduct academic studies.

#### *Brown University*

Brown University, founded in 1764, is the seventh oldest university in the country and it is known worldwide. The University supports research and advanced degrees in many science and art fields. The University is situated on a 133-acre campus near downtown Providence on College Hill. Viewing its grounds and setting, it is evident that the University has a strong dedication to a quality environment.<sup>5</sup>

The City's further integration and involvement with Brown University, for example through social sciences, would likely yield positive results. Additionally, key elements of the shopping

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<sup>5</sup> Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce and The Providence Journal Co., *Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce Business Profile 1868-1992*, (Providence, RI: Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce and The Providence Journal Co., 1992), 19.

environment serving Brown University on Thayer Street should be studied and better understood with the intent of transposing its success to downtown shopping concepts.

#### *Johnson and Wales University*

Johnson and Wales University, originally founded as a business college, is best known for its programs in culinary arts and the hospitality industry. As part of on going 'hands on' training programs, the University is involved in the operation of a number of restaurants and hotels in the area. This presents unique opportunities for student involvement in downtown public host and hospitality programs yet to be devised.<sup>6</sup>

Major parts of the campus are interwoven into the fabric of the City's downtown core. As a result, the University's interest in downtown revitalization is

high. Three buildings in the study area (see section 3.1) are currently owned by Johnson and Wales. These are Dreyfuss Hall at 87 Mathewson Street, the Burrill Building at 138 Mathewson Street and Bell Hall at 317 Westminster Street. Interview sources reveal that a fourth building, the Lederer Building at 139 Mathewson Street, is currently under agreement for purchase by the University, pending other business arrangements.

The Johnson and Wales place in the downtown extends beyond land holding and development projects. The presence of the student body in the City has positive aspects. Dormitory and classroom space on Mathewson and Westminster Streets put more people on the streets at varying hours.

#### *Rhode Island School of Design*

Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) is an internationally acknowledged art institute and is

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 19.

located near downtown at the foot of College Hill. RISD is one of the most extensively equipped art schools in the country and attracts talented artists of every discipline. The school offers a total of 20 different degree programs.<sup>7</sup>

RISD has a reputation for style-setting aesthetics. Successful school involvement in design projects with the City would evoke a positive image. RISD student involvement in creative projects downtown can be expected to bring unique, innovative results, ensuring a one-of-a-kind solutions. Joint projects would possibly involve departments at RISD such as sculpture, landscape architecture or architecture.

#### *Other Colleges and Universities*

Providence College (PC) is a parochial institution located in the Elmhurst section of Providence. Direct involvement with downtown is minimal but the presence of PC adds to the overall diversity of the City. Rhode Island College (RIC) is the oldest public institution of higher education in Rhode Island and is located in Providence. Currently RIC has little involvement with downtown but it is possible that some programs could be integrated with downtown needs (i.e. gerontology and activities at the senior center on Mathewson Street). The University of Rhode Island (URI) is based in Kingston but the School of Continuing Education (CCE) and the Department of Community Planning's Urban Field Center, are located in facilities near downtown. URI involvement with downtown tends to be on a smaller scale through single class or individual student projects. Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI), offering associates

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 19.

degrees and vocational-technical training, is based in Warwick but some of its classes are held in Providence. Like the other schools mentioned, it is possible that CCRI programs could be related to activities in downtown. New downtown activity would also tend to draw student body patronage from these local institutions.

### 2.3 Artisan Presence in the City of Providence

Much to the City's advantage, there are a large number of artists residing within Providence. This is due, in part, to the activities of the Rhode Island School of Design. Enrolled art students as well as graduates of the institution find reasonable rents and favorable support to pursue their endeavors in the City. Other artists, not necessarily associated with the School, have tended to cluster here because of the favorable conditions.

Artistic activities can be classified into two broad categories. The first category is performance art which includes dance, music and theater. The second category is visual art such as painting and sculpture. Performance and visual arts are equally well represented in Providence. Both types of art have specific needs and each also offers specific advantages to a community.

#### *Performance Art*

Performance art usually requires small to moderate size performance space of 200 to 600 seats. Performance art also requires sufficient low-cost rehearsal space. Proper recognition and representation on an arts council as well as possible service assistance would stabilize any given performance group. Performance art offers cultural enrichment that functions as a strong urban attraction. Popular performances put people on the

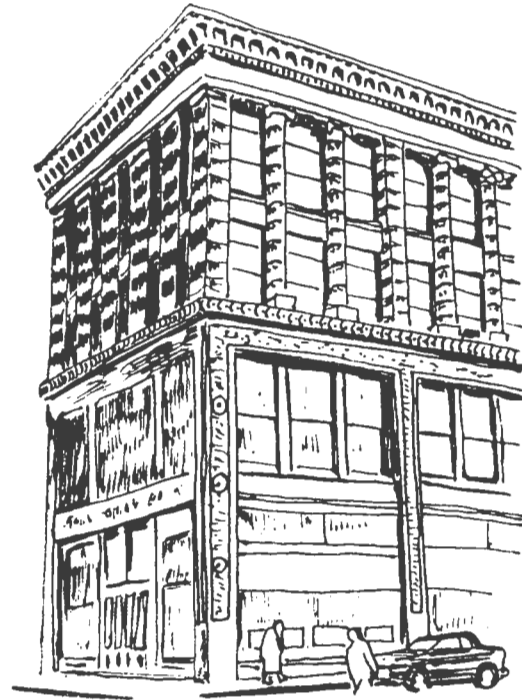
street in the evening hours. Street performances promote a festival atmosphere of great appeal in an urban street environment.

### *Visual Art*

Visual art requires exhibition space for finished pieces. Inexpensive studio space is also needed by the visual artist. Visual art offers enrichment to all those who experience it. Galleries as well as public display space can be strong attractions.

Both types of art, by nature, evoke human interaction. It is well known that the artist gravitates to urban settings where interior space is inexpensive and atmosphere abounds. It is then that the general populace, often led by the affluent, follow. The cultural attraction of art is a powerful draw to leisure activities. In support of art and its patrons, the establishment of support services and restaurants will

bring greater stability. Proper capitalization on artisan presence in Providence can yield positive results.



*The Tilden Thurber Building*

### III - Inventory and Analysis

*This Chapter presents a physical inventory and an urban design analysis of the Mathewson Street study area.*

#### 3.1 Mathewson Street Physical Inventory

In this section, the study area, as described in Chapter One, is inventoried and examined for its physical qualities, as of this writing. Study criterion are building use, current zoning, building form and massing and present levels of Street activity.

##### *Land/ Building Use*

Land use on Mathewson Street has generally maintained the original intended use of existing structures. Street level uses are mostly, retail establishments or restaurants that serve the day time

pedestrian traffic (see Figure 3.1). Of the total of 15 retail stores on Mathewson Street, all are non-chain and most of them sell mid-range clothing (7 stores) or accessories (4 stores). Other retail activities on the street include a gift shop, a book store (second floor), a video store (second floor) and a smoke shop. On Mathewson Street, there are six restaurants which can be categorized as pizza shops (2), 'bar & grills' (3), and an 'upscale' cafe. Other service establishments on Mathewson Street include shoe repair, a coiffeur, security service, mail box service and a senior citizen drop-in center. At the street level, two stores are vacant. Above street level, building uses include the Perishable Theater, the Groundwerx Dance Company and a considerable amount of office space, much of which lies vacant. A detailed building/lot inventory is provided in Table 3.1

All vacant land on Mathewson Street is used for parking. These parcels are all the result of the past

### Legend

R	Retail
S	Service
D	Dining/Drinking
C	Church
E	Education
O	Office
*	Denotes Vacancy

### Mathewson Street Theme Development

### Current Ground Floor Uses

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0 50 100 150  
Scale 1" = 150'

Figure : 3.1

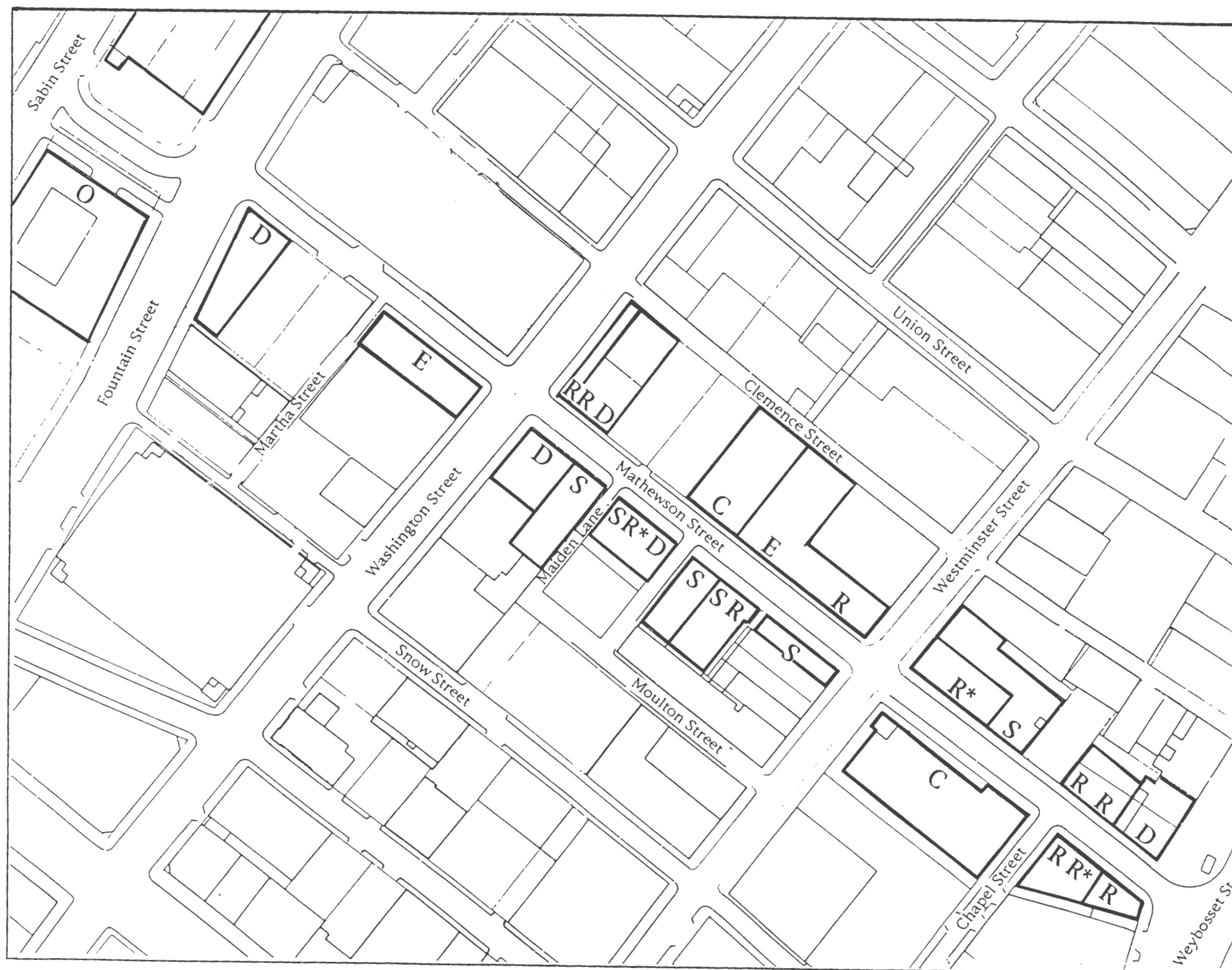




Table 3.1 - Mathewson Street Parcel Specific Inventory March 3, 1993									
Street No.	Assrs Lot #	Lot Size[S.F.]	Bdg. Name Date Built	No. Flrs	Bdg S.F. 1st flr/ttl	A.Style/ Condition	Current Use/ Occupancy	Bdg. Signage	Features/ Comment
110-112 Fountain St.	166	5098	Palmer Block 1915	7	4285/30,000	Victorian Exc	[1] Bar & Grill [2+] Offices	Good [Upscale]	Brick Inlay Awnings
-	236	57,149					Parking Lot	N.A.	Daily
73-79	167/168	54005760					Parking Lot	N.A.	Term
87	219	4720	Dreyfuss Hall 1890	4	4700/18,800	Victorian Exc	[1] J & W Club [2+] J & W Dorms	Good [Minimal]	Cornice Tile 1st Flr Band
102	353	1533	C.G. Arnold Building 1896	3	1500/4500	Victorian Good	[1] Smoke Shop [2+] Offices	Good [Period Acc.]	Brwn Stone
106-112	354	5974	Alexander Building 1892	2*	6100/12,200	Victorian Poor	[1] Clothing/Rest. [2] Video Store	Fair [Inacc.]	Low Quality Unsightly Renovation
105-109	339	3541	Arnold Building 1896	3	3600/10,000	Victorian Good	[1] Restaurant [2+] Theater	Good	Gd Awning Metal Bays
111	340	4300	R.I. Security Building 1896	3	4200/12,600	Victorian Fair	[1] Security Co. [2+] Theater	Poor [Modern]	Unsightly 1st Flr Renr:
119-127	341	4514	Rialto Building 1829**	2	4500/13,500	Neoclassical Fair	[1] Rest., T-Shirts Shoe Repair, Vacant [2] Vacant Parking Lot	Poor	Unsightly 1st Flr Renr: Gd 2nd Sty Daily
121-132	350/351	5890/6001						N.A.	
128-130	349	7199	United Methodist 1895	4	6500/26,000	Neoclassical Good	Church	Good	
133	342	3065	Squire Building 1896	3	3060/9180	Victorian Good	[1] Senior Ctr [2+] Off/Vacant	Poor [Big/Mod.]	Good Bays Unsightly 1st Flr Renr:

Table 3.1 Continued - Mathewson Street Parcel Specific Inventory							March 3, 1993		
Street No.	Assrs Lot #	Lot Size[S.F.]	Bdg. Name Date Built	No. Flrs	Bdg S.F. 1st flr/ttl	A.Style/ Condition	Current Use/ Occupancy	Bdg. Signage	Features/ Comment
138	346	11,037	Burrill Building 1891	5	11,200/56,000	Victorian [Italianade] Good	[1] Clothing/J&W [2+] J&W	Exc Acc. Stylish	Good Detail Awnings
139	343	4208	Lederer Building 1897	7	3600/25,200	Victorian [Italianade] Exc.	[1] Clothes/B Salon [2+] Vacant Office	Good	Ornate Det. Unique Colo Good Bays To Be Raise
299-301 Westminster St.	345	2065	Portion of Grace Park Site - 8179 S.F.		2	Contemp. Fair	[1] Mail Box Svc [2] Vacant	Fair Mod. Cheap	
290 Westminster St.	170	3736	Tilden Thurber Bdg. 1895	4	3700/14,800	Victorian Exc.	[1] Vacant Retail [2] Vacant Office	-	Good Detail
158	169	7487	Lapham Building 1904	9	7450/67,050	Victorian Exc	[1] Beauty Aids, Distributor [2+] Office/Vacant Church	Good	
153-159	410	16,588	Grace Church 1845	1&4	8000/?	Gothic Rev. Exc.		Exc [Appropriate]	
174-180	60, 172	3586 2860					Parking Lot	N.A.	Term
182-188	174	4120	Antiss-Manton Bdg 1885	3	3400/10,200	Victorian Exc.	[1] Clothes, Gifts [2] Book Store [3] Dance Studio	Good	Wood, Gd Renovation Mansard
183-191		5923	Winslow Building 1912	2&3	5300/12,300	Victorian Good	[1] Clothes, Jewelry [2+] Unoccupied	Fair [Inacc.]	Nice Roof on 2 Sty Sct
211-215 Weybosset St.	173	3822	Dyer Heirs Building 1875	3	4000/12,000	Victorian Exc.	[1] Restaurant on Mathewson [2+] Unoccupied	Exc [Stylish]	Simple Style Awning, Good Renn.

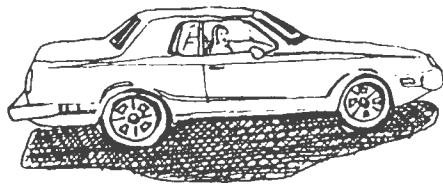
\* Building was originally three stories.

\*\* Multiple renovations have left little of original structure.

Table 3.1 Continued - Building Inventory Definitions:

Street No.	- Mathewson Street address, except where noted. <i>Source:</i> Site Reconnaissance and Downcity Retail District Plan.
Assrs Lot #	- City of Providence assessors lot number from City plat maps 20, 24 and 25. <i>Source:</i> City of Providence Assessors Office.
Lot Size (S.F.)	- <i>Source:</i> City of Providence Assessors Office.
Building Name	- <i>Source:</i> Site Reconnaissance and Downcity Retail District Plan.
Date Built	- <i>Source:</i> "Providence, A Citywide Survey of Historic Resources", P-P-7
No. Flrs	- Number of floors excluding basement. <i>Source:</i> Site Reconnaissance.
Bdg (S.F.)	- Building area in square feet, first floor followed by building total (excluding basement).
1st flr/ttl	<i>Source:</i> Downcity Retail District Plan.
A. Style	- Architectural Style and Condition noted by;
Condition	Exc.- All structure and detail are period accurate or unobtrusive in 'new' condition. Good- Structure and/or detail may show some wear, dirt or some period inaccuracy. Fair- Minor structural deterioration, evidence of neglect, inaccurate renovations. Poor- Considerable deterioration, neglect and/or poor quality renovations. <i>Source:</i> Site Reconnaissance.
Current Use/ Occupancy	- Use(s) by floor number in brackets. Occupancy assumed and noted if otherwise. <i>Source:</i> Site Reconnaissance.
Bdg. Signage	- Building signage condition [with comments] as noted by: Exc. Period accurate, affective, unobtrusive, in good repair. Good Lacking in some of the qualities listed above. Fair Period inaccurate and obtrusive and/or neglected. Poor Unsightly, Obtrusive, and/or in need of repair. <i>Source:</i> Site Reconnaissance.

demolition of buildings. These gaps in the streetwall can be considered detrimental to the urban character on Mathewson Street. Three parking lots with a total area of about 69,000 square feet rent parking by the hour. An allotment of 300 square feet per vehicle represents a total of 230 parking spaces in these three lots. Also, there are approximately 38 parking spaces along the Northeast side of Mathewson Street. In total, there are 268 short-term parking spaces in the study area. Monthly rental parking is available on three other parcels that total about 18,300 square feet. This represents a total of 61 long-term parking spaces. In general, parking availability is considered sufficient by city agencies to meet current needs.



### *Zoning*

Current zoning on all of Mathewson Street is termed DD or "Down-city District". The DOWNCITY district is an overlay zone that was designated in January of 1992 as a result of Andres Duany's DOWNCITY Plan. The intent of the DOWNCITY district designation is...

"...to direct the development of the downtown (D Zones) by regulating the design of buildings and open spaces and to foster preservation to insure that; new development is compatible with the existing historic building fabric and the historic character of downtown; development relates to the pedestrian; retail be developed along certain street frontages; development promotes

the arts, entertainment and housing; and, the goals of the Downcity Plan of the Comprehensive Plan are achieved"<sup>1</sup>

The Downcity District allows residential, institutional, cultural, general services, trade and parking but all are subject to contingents intended to preserve historic character as specified by use guidelines discussed in Chapter 4.

#### *Building Proportion, Form and Massing*

Building form and massing along Mathewson Street is of excellent basic proportion. In general the street width averages 50 feet, most buildings have less than 75 feet of frontage and building height averages

three to five stories (30 to 60 feet). These proportions set an excellent pedestrian scale and an urban rhythm which is further enhanced by outstanding Victorian architectural details. However, recent efforts to modernize have altered some of the original character of Mathewson Street. Also, several vacant parcels of land, currently used as parking lots, interrupt the otherwise ideal street wall (see Figures 3.2 and 3.3).

#### *Amenities*

Sidewalk widths are eight feet on the Southwest side and twelve feet on the Northeast side of the street and the space for amenities is limited. There are no benches or outdoor leisure areas on Mathewson Street. Sidewalks function merely as an artery for pedestrian traffic. Handicap accessibility appears good as curb cuts and ramps are provided at each intersection but some slopes appear too steep. Plantings are minimal and small trees are located in wells at different

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<sup>1</sup> City of Providence Department of Planning and Development. *Zoning Bylaws §504*. (Providence, RI: City of Providence, rev. January 8, 1992), 2.



**Note:**

This Sequence of Photographs depicts the pedestrian experience of Mathewson Street. Exemplary Victorian architecture, excellent human scale and daytime pedestrian activity flourish. Gaps in the streetwall noticeably disrupt the quality of the urban rhythm on the Street.

**Mathewson Street**  
Theme Development

**Photographic  
Essay**

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Figure : 3.2

**Note:**

This Sequence of Photographs depicts the pedestrian experience of Mathewson Street. Exemplary Victorian architecture, excellent human scale and daytime pedestrian activity flourish. Gaps in the streetwall noticeably disrupt the quality of the urban rhythm on the Street.

## Mathewson Street Theme Development

### Photographic Essay

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Figure : 3.3

intervals along the Street. Contemporary concrete bollards have been placed on the sidewalk adjacent to Grace Church and they appear somewhat out of place.

Sidewalk materials are predominantly concrete ranging in conditions of 'like new' to good in places with some heaving and cracking in high use areas. Some sections of the sidewalk have been replaced with lower cost bituminous material much of which has settled and/or heaved. The sidewalk at the intersection of Mathewson and Westminster Streets is paved with brick as a result of past revitalization efforts on Westminster Street. Brick paving from street revitalization activity also joins Mathewson Street at the intersections of Washington and Weybosset Streets. Although in good condition, brick paving adjacent to concrete panels with bituminous patches results in a sidewalk surface that is inconsistent as well as a potential hazard in places.

#### *Street Activity*

During the day there is a significant amount of activity on the Street. Pedestrian and vehicular traffic move with a constant flow with both peaking at morning, noon and evening rush hours. Daily pedestrian activity consists of office workers, shoppers, noon church service attendees, deliveries, senior citizens involved at the senior center, and Johnson and Wales students. In the evening, pedestrian activity subsides considerably and security becomes a key issue for those who remain. It is clear that new evening activities must be developed.

Vehicular traffic moves in surges as pedestrians filter through cars waiting at intersections on the Street. Traffic often stops momentarily as traffic lights change or vehicles maneuver to park. On street parking is in continual use and adds a crowded feel to the street. Delivery vehicles commonly double park or park on the sidewalk opposite the parking lane and



while this potential hazard is both inconvenient as well as illegal, it seems to add to the vitality of the street.

Qualities of sound also serve to enrich the urban experience on Mathewson Street. The bell in the tower of Grace Church rings on the quarter hour and provides a sense of time as well as the timelessness of an old European city. WALE, the Johnson and Wales talk radio station, broadcasts its programs through a loudspeaker from its studio across from Grace Church. The muffled radio voices echoing down Mathewson Street add a cosmopolitan essence to the city atmosphere. Conversations of groups of Johnson and Wales students add a youthful tone to the air.



### 3.2 Study Area Analysis

There are a number of methods utilized in the formulation of an urban design theme. These methods deal with issues of form, massing, enclosure, rhythm, nodes, linkage, landmarks and view corridors. An area subject to design can be analyzed through these means to establish the most predominant positive and negative characteristics. This process, in turn, indicates inherent qualities as well as elements most in need of attention from a design perspective. Design methods used in this study are figure-ground analysis, linkage-node analysis, view corridor analysis and building rhythm analysis.

#### *Figure-Ground Analysis*

The shading of existing structures on the figure-ground analysis serves to highlight the spatial voids that exist between buildings (see Figure 3.4). This

# Legend

-  Existing Structure
-  Structure To Be Removed

## Mathewson Street Theme Development

### Figure Ground Analysis

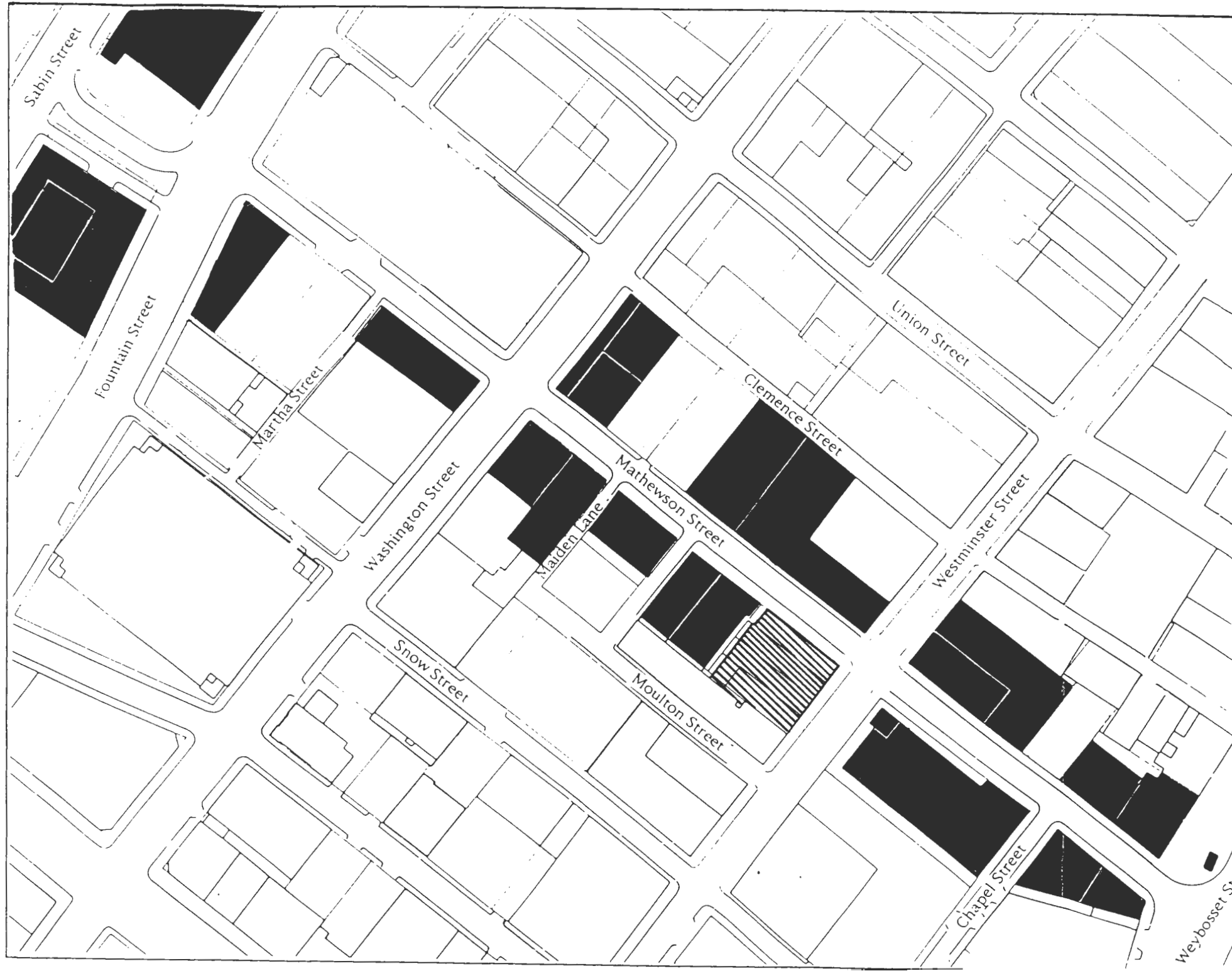
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0 50 100 150  
Scale 1" = 150'



Figure : 3.4



technique shows the size and relationship of the existing buildings to the pedestrian environment. This method highlights areas where enclosure is lacking as well as irregularities in the building pattern. From a design standpoint, a consistent urban pattern, in this case a streetwall, is most amenable. Consistency in the streetwall is not to imply that no breaks should exist. Routes that connects nodes and planned open spaces are key elements in a successful streetscape design. Connecting routes and open space are those elements around which enclosure is designed.<sup>2</sup> Figure-ground analysis on Mathewson Street shows a reasonably consistent street wall with some inappropriate, random gaps.

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<sup>2</sup> Roger Trancik, *Finding Lost Space* (New York, NY: Vanostrand Reinhold, 1986), 98.

### *Linkage Analysis*

Linkage analysis shows the composition of urban form. This is often a combination of psychological perceptions as well as the existing physical environment. Linkage analysis includes the following: links - pedestrian connectors between points, nodes - endpoints or places along the way that cause people to congregate, landmarks - which are generally accepted reference points not necessarily of significant cultural or historical value, edges - that are either perceived or actual physical boundaries where some conceptual or use characteristic changes.<sup>3</sup>

Mathewson Street represents the Northwest to Southeast axis through the center of the downtown core. The study area is compact and foot travel from end to end takes less than five minutes. Linkage to nodes within the study area as well as to other activity areas in the City are of equal importance.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 106.

Linkages (see Figure 3.5) are generally the sidewalks in the study area. Logically, they are the safest and most interesting pedestrian routes. Minor linkages shown are those routes that are not heavily traveled by pedestrians. Chapel Street has no retail activity and is utilized mostly by pedestrians accessing nearby parking. The linkage between Sabin and Fountain Streets is weak not only because little pedestrian draw but also because Fountain Street represents the perceived edge of the Downtown core. The Providence Journal-Bulletin Building and the Department of Social Services Building are non-retail establishments that have little to offer to the typical Downtown pedestrian. In order to firmly attach a Mathewson Street linkage to the Convention Center it would be logical to extend this edge by the establishment of some pedestrian attraction or connector.

Vehicular access to Mathewson Street requires an understanding of the downtown street pattern because it is part of a network of one-way streets. Easiest out-of-City access is attained from taking the Broadway or Atwells Avenue exits from Interstate 95 and then navigating a circumferential route on Empire and Weybosset Streets. It should also be noted that the direction of traffic flow is toward the Convention Center.

Public transportation linkages to Mathewson Street are excellent. Either end of Mathewson Street is serviced by the free loop of the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) bus system. Two bus routes (number 12-East Greenwich and number 13-Arctic-Washington) travel down Mathewson Street on their way to Kennedy Plaza.

Major nodes shown on Figure 3.5 are those where general segments of the population would tend to gather. Public seating at the corner of Weybosset

Legend

- ■ ■ Linkage
- Weak Linkage
- Node
- ★ Landmark
- ||||| Downtown Edge

Mathewson Street  
Theme Development

Linkage Analysis

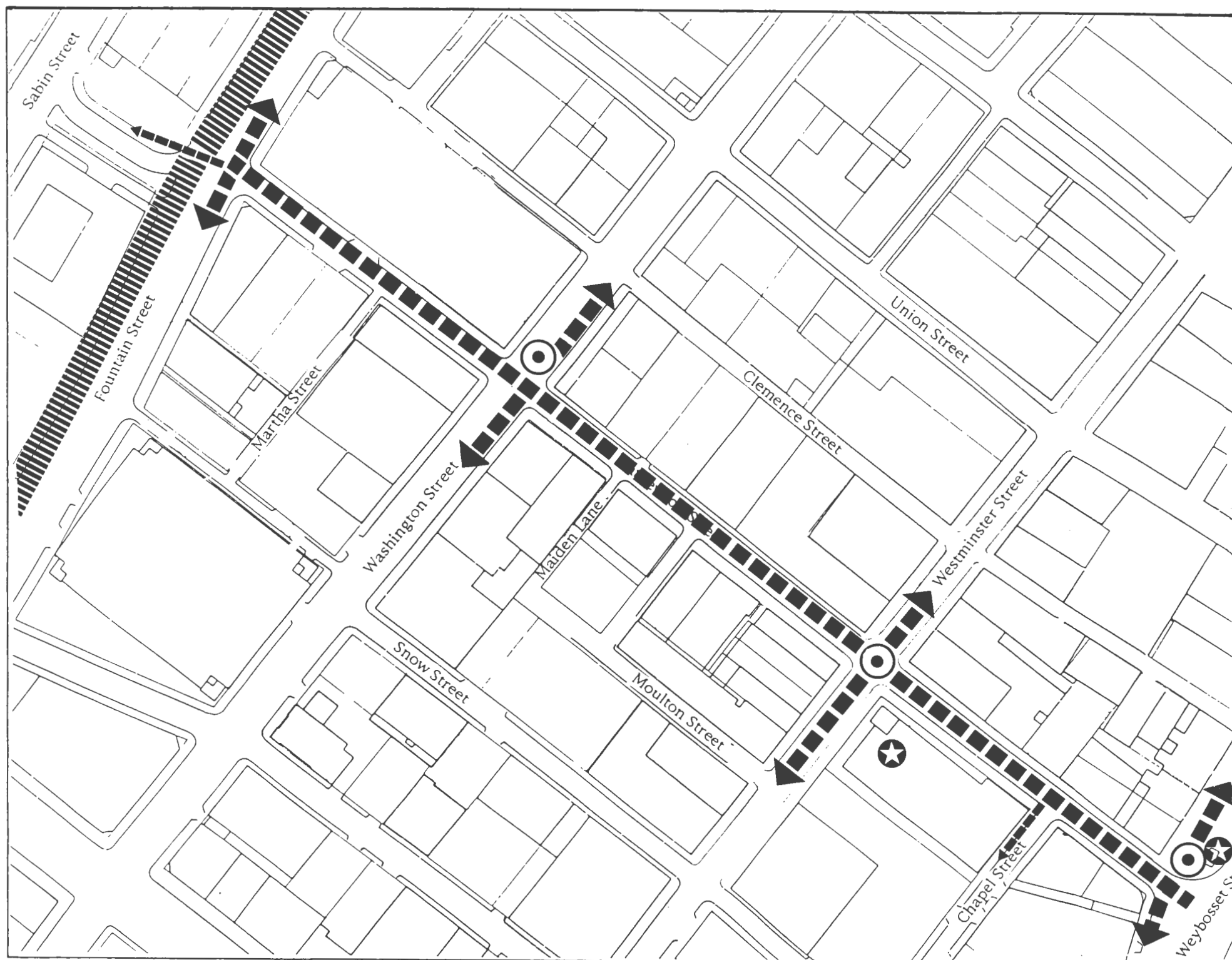
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0 50 100 150  
Scale 1" = 150'



Figure : 3.5



and Mathewson Streets attracts many pedestrians who sit to have lunch, rest or observe. The intersection of Mathewson and Westminster Streets forms a node due to several activities that occur simultaneously. Public seating, daily church services, a street vendor and Gladdings retail activity collectively make this intersection a vital node. The other major node on Mathewson Street is at the corner of Washington Street. The corner Smoke Shop sells newspapers and convenience items and attracts many pedestrians. Across Washington Street is a bus stop where people wait at the provided shelter. Other possibly minor nodes are the entrance to the Burrill Building where Johnson and Wales students tend to congregate and the Squire Building where elderly activities are held within.

The major landmark in the study area is Grace Church accentuated by its stone buttressing and topped by a steeple and clock. Its form and presence

is unmistakable and it constitutes a major reference point even from a citywide perspective. Several other buildings on the Street, while of landmark quality, are consistent with one another to such a degree that no one structure can be singled out for its qualitative merits. A new landmark bordering the study area is the Convention Center. Although its modern architectural style only turns a blue curved glass wall toward Mathewson Street, its recent construction and flagship nature of its mission make it a noticeable addition to the Providence cityscape. Another landmark is the now closed comfort station at the corner of Mathewson and Weybosset Streets. Its size and form are unusual and remembered by those who see it. It is currently slated for reuse as a downtown information booth/police substation.

*View Corridor Analysis*

View corridors enhance the urban experience. A mix of positive views rely on variations in the focal distance from a few feet (i.e. window displays) to potentially miles away (i.e. distant landmarks, skylines or adjacent hills). This mix of focal distances provides a feeling of enclosure without crowding as well as expanse without lack of orientation. This quality heightens the positive pedestrian experience. All views into and out of the study area are urban in nature and are generally reflective of the fine grain historic character of Providence. Views to either end of Mathewson Street, are positive with a defined focal point that is framed by exemplary architecture. Figure 3.6 shows the view corridors in the study area.





View corridor 1 is the positive visual experience along Mathewson Street. Mathewson Street is straight, enclosed and portray positive urban images. The view to the Northwest end of the Street, is the massive

curved glass bay of the new Convention Center. The view to the Southeast end of Mathewson Street, is the marquee of the Providence Performing Arts Center. Framing elements of the Grace Church steeple and Victorian architectural details are responsible for excellent visual linkages within the study area. Overall, each major cross street offers some kind of interesting view that is rich in urban character.

View Corridor 2 looks to the East and has a distant view across the riverfront to College Hill. Openspace along the riverfront serves to widen the view for a panoramic effect. The neoclassical architecture of College Hill appears closely spaced in an array of red brick structures, variety of rooflines and several white steeples. This view is a strong reinforcement for the historic character of Providence.

View corridor 3 is a view of the old Union Station. This structure is exemplary of Nineteenth Century railroad architecture. The unusual orange

### Legend

-  1 Mathewson Street Views
-  2 View to Union Station
-  3 View to College Hill
-  4 View to Financial District

### Mathewson Street Theme Development

### View Corridors

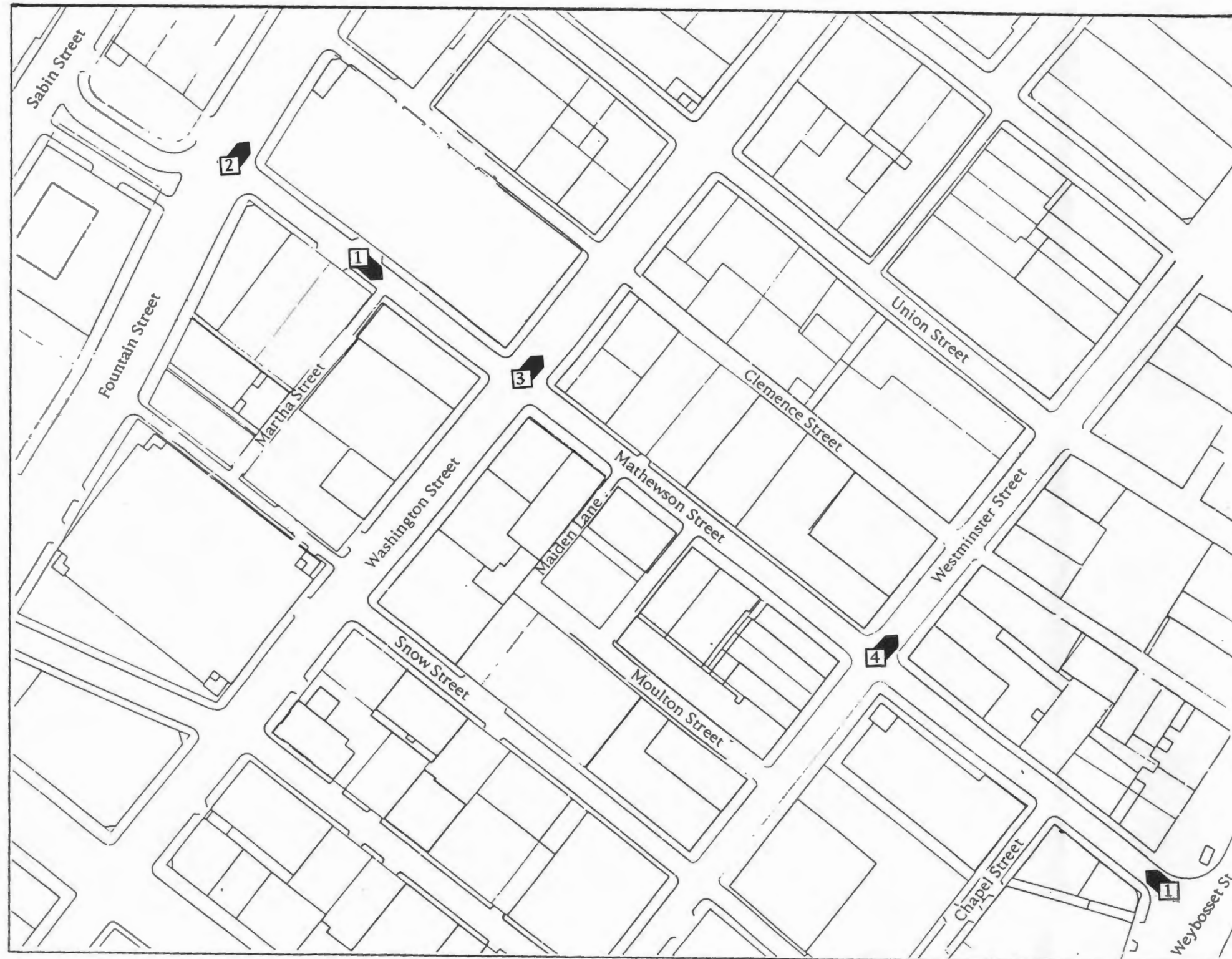
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0 50 100 150  
Scale 1" = 150'



Figure : 3.6





brick and the red hipped roof fill the frame composed of other older buildings along Fountain Street. The building looks architecturally significant and views of it reinforce the architectural heritage of Providence.

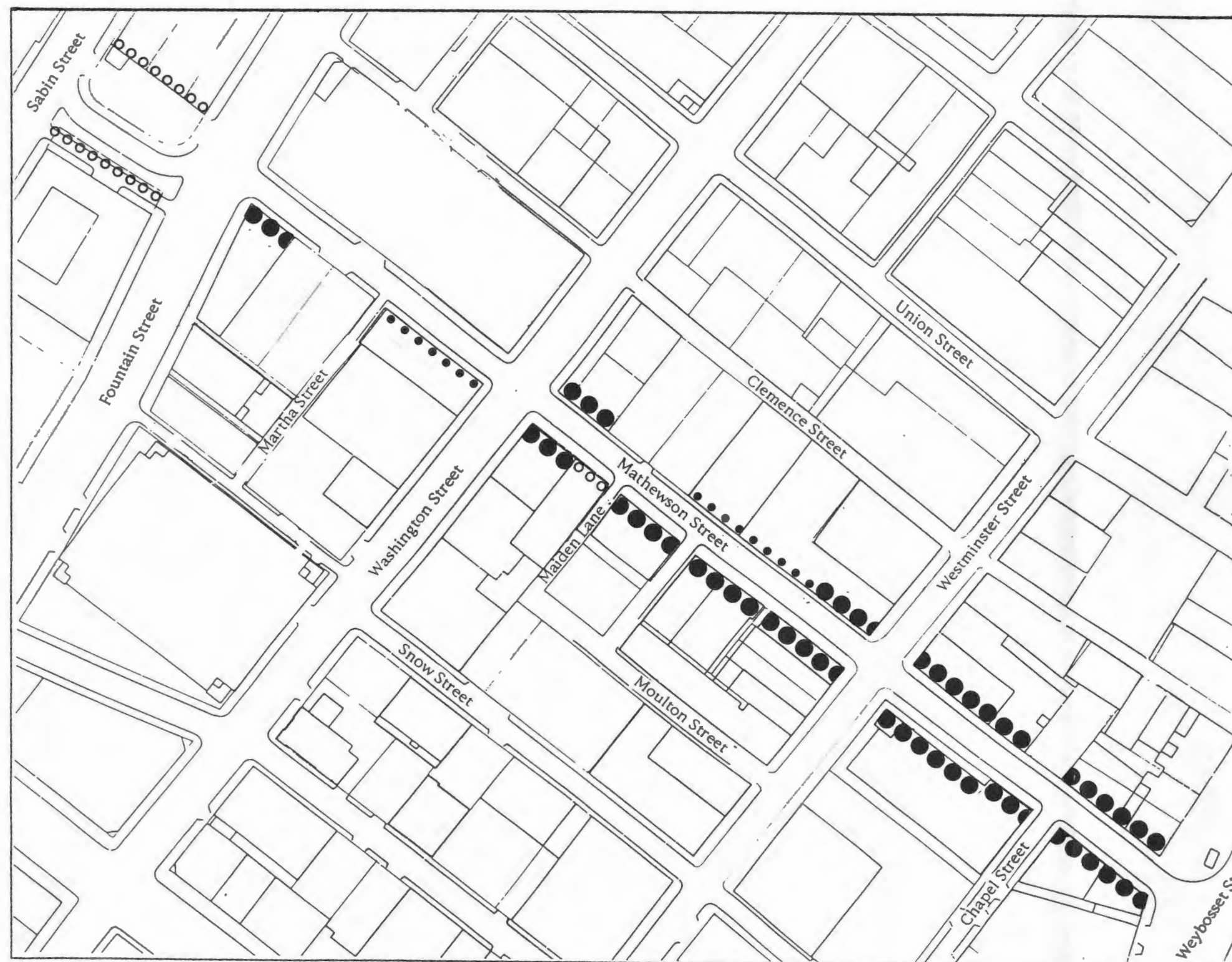
#### *Building Rhythm Analysis*

Building rhythm studies the experiential characteristics of the existing street wall (Figure 3.7). This analysis determines pedestrian perceptions influenced by wall texture, transparency and regularity of change. For example a series of 3 facades 50 feet in length each with doorways and display windows holds greater potential for a more positive pedestrian experience than a single facade with limited windows and a total length of 150 feet. This concept is not to condemn the construction of large buildings but merely to stress the maintenance of a hospitable pedestrian scale street level facade treatment. Larger buildings constructed more recently than most of

those on Mathewson Street tend to present a more inhospitable facade to the sidewalk. This is often the case due to more monumental scale and the functional needs of modern architecture. The best remedy for an existing inhospitable facade is careful landscape design or amenities placement that focuses on other positive qualities nearby. Pedestrian neutral facades are transitional enclosure planes that may offer little with which to interact yet provide some scale and detail that tend to frame or direct attention toward other positive attributes.

### Legend

- Hospitable Facade
- Neutral Facade
- Inhospitable Facade



### Mathewson Street Theme Development

### Street Level Facade Character

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0 50 100 150

Scale 1" = 150'



Figure : 3.7

#### IV - Elements of Theme Development

*To develop a successful urban design theme for Mathewson Street, it is essential to look at user needs, potential new users and existing guiding documentation. The first section of this Chapter looks at the needs, abilities and limitations of identified stakeholder groups that are concerned about Mathewson Street. This is followed by a list of potential markets that may play a part in the theme. The next section reviews The City of Providence's existing Urban Design Guidelines. The final section of this chapter discusses the specific parts of The Downcity Implementation Plan that relates to the development of a Mathewson Street Theme.*

##### 4.1 Stakeholders

In the development of an urban design theme for Mathewson Street it is necessary to identify the stakeholders. Each stakeholder has certain *needs* regarding the urban design theme while at the same time has *potentials* to offer positive input to the theme. Each stakeholder also has some type of *constraint* that limits their individual success. Table 4.1 identifies the stakeholders with their needs, potentials and constraints. The information presented in the table is derived from the current literature and numerous interviews conducted by the author.

##### *Mathewson Street Property Owners and Merchants*

Businesses on Mathewson Street have much to offer and they stand to gain greater prosperity from a successful urban design theme. Their strongest assets are the financial know-how inherent to business activity, financial leverage through existing capital and

Table 4.1 Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder:	Key Needs/Desires:	Potentials:	Constraints:
Mathewson Street Property Owners and Merchants	Increased Building Occupancy, Ready Market, Positive Shopping Environment, [Improvements in Parking, Safety and Aesthetics].	Property Ownership Represents Financial Leverage, Available Rental Space, Potential Commercial Draw.	Financial Responsibility Limits Ability to Participate, Limited Organization but it is Improving.
Johnson and Wales University	Increased Security for Students, Positive Academic Environment [More Activities, Better Aesthetics].	Highly Organized, Financial Stability, Strong Pedestrian Street Presence, Potential Student Body Participation Resource.	Participation Must be Initiated by Outside Forces.
Local Performing and Visual Artists	Performance, Gallery, Studio and Housing Space.	Organizational Structure Improving. Strong Cultural Draw, Activity Focus.	Little Financial Power
The Providence Convention Center Authority	Attractive and Secure Downtown Environment with Appropriate Events and Retail Activities to Ensure Continued Success.	Major Potential Revenue Source for Downtown.	Little Direct Input to Downtown Activity Currently Exists.
Historic Preservation Interests	Sensitive Rehabilitation of Historic Structures.	Knowledge to be Applied to Appropriate Rehabilitation and Aesthetic Improvement.	Influence is Exercised Only Through Design Guidelines.
Agencies and Organizations of the City of Providence	Downtown Vitality, Economic Stability, Linkage Between Downtown and the Convention Center.	Initiative, Catalytic and Organizational Interests, Power to Mandate and Enforce Standards.	Minor Economic Power, Strong Political Interplay.

the potential to draw retail markets through wise merchandise selection. Each of these assets can be enhanced through increased communication with other businesses.

Efforts to better organize downtown business are currently underway, but communication between merchants is not organized much beyond informal dialogue. However, this dialogue should be recognized as the beginnings of a more solid organization. This could pave the way for financial support of an urban design theme and collective marketing concepts. Efforts have already been made to create a downtown management district (DMD). The DMD would be a City recognized organization that keeps local businesses in better contact with one another and helps to unify their efforts of improvement. This would solidify the business community and clarify their collective goals. However it must be understood by businesses involved in the management district that

the mere creation of a district does not set the rules by which the management district will operate. This confusion has concerned individuals involved in past downtown management districting efforts.

The Mathewson Street business community also needs to have a better idea of their current markets as well as the potential for new business. Collaboration within the business community itself as well as between other stakeholders listed here will be necessary to direct investment with the greatest efficiency.

#### *Johnson and Wales University*

Johnson and Wales University has expressed great interest and support of efforts to make improvements on Mathewson Street. A successful urban design theme on Mathewson Street would help improve their urban campus. They are willing to provide funding to advance projects that benefit other

stakeholders as well. Educational programs can be incorporated into street theme development and anticipated convention activity.

Currently, the student body presence in the downtown represents the major segment of population after the typical business day. The student population will be among the first to interact with new downtown activities. The student presence also has the potential to enhance the attraction of new activities to other segments of the population due to a potential 'college town' atmosphere. Academic student involvement through Johnson and Wales education programs can also be a cost effective and capable labor source for daily operations of the urban design theme.

With respect to financial activity in general, Johnson and Wales is highly organized and has a clear vision of their own goals. While investments made by Johnson and Wales would logically serve their own best interest, a coordinated program, such as the

development of this theme, among all stakeholders could multiply the benefits to all. Together, local businesses and Johnson and Wales could coordinate new restaurant, retail, street activities and hospitality related ventures to maximize benefit with minimum redundancy of services offered.

#### *Local Performing and Visual Artists*

The general population usually finds an artisan presence in an area very attractive. This attribute in itself should be viewed as a powerful resource and other stakeholders should collaborate to assist in the promotion of the artisan environment. Artists are in need of space and publicity to further their endeavors. Often they have little power to attain an ideal working environment.

Contact with key representatives of the art presence in Providence can be done through the recently formed organization, Total Arts Providence.

This organization includes performing and visual artists as well as representatives of other related groups and art institutions within the City. Total Arts Providence represents a concentrated focus of energy for major portions of the City's art culture. Collaborative organization is a positive step toward good representation of this stakeholder group.

Artist activities could play a key role in Mathewson Street events. Such activities would be unlike those found in a typical shopping mall. Stabilization of the arts in downtown Providence will bring new interest, support and prosperity.

#### *The Providence Convention Center Authority*

The Convention Center Authority is aware of the necessity to have a vital activity center nearby. Their concerns involve security, cleanliness and aesthetics along with an appealing commercial tenant mix on Mathewson Street. Preferred commercial mix,

in their opinion, includes boutiques, galleries and a variety of restaurants ranging from sports bars to gourmet fare. The Convention Center represents a strong potential revenue source for the City, provided a good mixture of events, dining and retail activity, in aesthetically pleasing surroundings, are available to greet delegates. The Convention Center Authority has little direct input to activities on Mathewson Street but importance of the Convention Center must be considered.

The Center has recently opened on a limited scale. The convention hotel will open soon. Early 1995, when both are in full operation, could be considered as a target date to have the Mathewson Street Theme well under way if not already in place. Confirmed bookings have been made for the rest of the decade and provided a theme is in place, Providence's role in the convention industry could be strong.

*Historic Preservation Interests*

Preservation interests, such as The Rhode Island Historical Society and The Providence Preservation Society wish to maintain general historic character of the Downtown. There is concern with scale and massing of in-fill development as well as a sensitive rehabilitation of the existing storefronts. Issues of architectural compatibility of new structures, continuation of existing building rhythm, total building height and appropriate amenities are also important.

Their recommendations are much in keeping with the existing urban design guidelines described in section 4.3. Historically, the Street was home to the first theater in Providence (The Rialto at #125) and some historians have felt that theater entertainment could be reintroduces as part of the theme development. Providence's industrial or maritime heritage have had little direct effect in shaping

Mathewson Street and historians warn that any urban design theme must be careful not to 'recreate' something that was never there.

*Agencies and Organizations of The City of Providence*

Stakeholders in this category include governmental agencies such as the Department of Planning and Development, Public Works and the Police as well as quasi-public organizations like the Chamber of Commerce. Agencies and organizations within the City are often the link that provides the drive for unified public interest.

The City has the legal power to adopt and enforce ordinances that maintain a given standard. City agencies can be directed to provide general service and act as a catalyst to organize new projects. However current economics give the City little power to complete a given initiative without input and support from the other stakeholders. Creativity, such



as City demonstration programs, privatization and public/private partnerships are probably the answer to implementing an urban design theme.

Table 4.1 shows that needs and desires of each stakeholder is either similar or complimentary to the others and each can be encompassed in a single urban design theme for Mathewson Street. The potentials of some stakeholders can meet the needs of the others while they can offer benefits in return. All stakeholders favor improvements in safety, security, aesthetics and parking. All stakeholders agree that major improvements along Mathewson Street should be well underway, if not significantly complete by 1995, when the Convention Center is in full operation.



#### 4.2 Potential Markets

There are a number of markets that the Urban Design Theme could help attract. Each market has defined characteristics and needs that must be understood in order to attract them to Mathewson Street.

##### *The Convention Market*

The Convention Center is seen as a major market for the Downtown but it must first be clear that convention activity will only be a part of the total market. As the convention market demands stabilize, an appropriate number of related services will thrive. Convention market support includes, boutiques, souvenirs of the City, State and New England as well as eating and entertainment. Technical services, graphics and equipment suppliers will also be needed for convention preparations. The arts presence will

greatly add to the involvement of convention delegates on the Street. Performance art will inspire delegate interaction but only minor revenues through fine art sales can be expected.

#### *Regional Shoppers*

Regional shoppers should be considered as an important potential market. But, in order to attract them, Mathewson Street must offer a 'unique product'. This product would include a specific market draw such as fine art, outlet stores or top end establishments. This could be effectively packaged and promoted along with dining and entertainment for a total urban experience with great appeal. Other key elements to success that involve the Mathewson Street theme are security, cleanliness and readily adequate parking.

#### *Arts and Entertainment Patrons*

Providence is inherently a major cultural draw. Theater, sports and performance entertainment already attract many patrons to the City during the evening, thereby stretching active street hours. The Mathewson Street theme should mix arts and entertainment with other activities. This mix of activities often spells success for an urban environment. Often not feasible without financial assistance, space for art galleries on the Street would further enhance the overall environment and market mix helping to stabilize the local economy. Fine dining and boutique shopping are often associated with the arts and entertainment market.

#### *Downtown Employees*

Downtown employees are a captive market during the business day. They are currently responsible for most of the daily economic vitality.

Their needs include restaurants, convenience shopping and some services. As a diversity of new merchandise and daytime entertainment becomes available in new establishments downtown, greater employee participation can be expected. This participation in some cases may be stretched into the evening hours as downtown workers linger to see specific events.

#### *Johnson and Wales Students*

At the current time the Johnson and Wales student body is the only market segment present twenty-four hours a day. Student needs include convenience shopping, school related supplies and some inexpensive dining. As new services and entertainment evolves on Mathewson Street, limited increases in student participation as dictated by their own time and budget limitations can be expected.

#### *Downtown Housing*

All stakeholders agree that housing is key to a successful downtown. Like Johnson and Wales students, the twenty-four hour presence of residents will stabilize downtown vitality. Downtown residents have more political influence and disposable income than students. At the present time, there is no non-student housing Downtown core itself, while some housing does exist in nearby Capitol Center. It is important to inspire building owners to adapt structures for residential use. Issues of security and parking are key considerations in the advancement of this idea.

#### 4.3 City of Providence Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines adopted by the City of Providence have been devised to keep new development compatible and to guide renovations to

existing structures located in the Downtown. The area, zoned Downcity District (DD), encompasses the core of the City, including all of Mathewson Street. The intent is to preserve the existent character and building rhythm through controls on building facade design and open space designation. The Guidelines also seek to promote alternative uses that would extend activity hours on the streets in the District. The guidelines are generally compatible with goals and objectives of the Mathewson Street urban design theme presented in Chapter Five.

#### *Building Use*

The urban design guidelines base allowable land/building use on Andreas Duany's system of 'A' and 'B' streets as described in his Downcity Plan. 'A' streets are those of significant character where every effort should be made to promote positive urban experience. 'B' streets are those subject to more

relaxed regulations so that they may provide service and support for 'A' streets. Table 4.2 describes allowable uses on 'A' and 'B' streets.

#### *Building Design Characteristics*

The urban design guidelines also regulate general design characteristics for new construction as well as renovations to existing structures. Guidelines for new construction address generally accepted massing principles such as, zero setback on lot lines to preserve streetwall, three story minimum building height to preserve existing enclosure and buildings over six stories have upper floors set back to preserve natural light at the street level. New construction guidelines also address first floor facade design issues including ceiling height, window characteristics and building entrances. Guidelines for existing structures try to preserve building character through alteration limits, window characteristics and lighting.

Table 4.2, Providence Urban Design Guidelines Allowable Land Uses.

Use	'A' Streets		'B' Streets	
	First Floors	Upper Floors	First Floors	Upper Floors
Residential	N	Y	N	Y
Institutional	Y	Y	Y	Y
Cultural	Y	Y	Y	Y
General Service	Y	Y	Y	Y
Trade	Y	Y	Y	Y
Parking Garage	W	W	Y	Y
Parking Lot	N	-	Y	-

Definitions: Y - Yes  
N - No

W - Waiver may be granted if parking is buffered from street by other allowable uses and building is of compatible design.

Source: City of Providence Urban Design Guidelines.

### *Signage, Landscaping and Screening*

Urban design guidelines address commercial signage, landscaping, and visual screens. Signage characteristics, shown in Table 4.3, are outlined with the intent to produce results that do not detract from the existing historic context. Size, style and material are regulated to ensure signage is unobtrusive and tasteful.

Landscaping of openspace is required and standards for it are set. Planting placement, minimum

size and type are defined. Standards pertaining to blank walls, accent plantings and screening of approved parking areas are also addressed.

The Urban Design Guidelines are enforced by the Design Review Committee (DRC). The DRC has five members serving staggered terms and each with different professional backgrounds. The Committee has powers to approve or deny applications as well as grant waivers for special exceptions. DRC approval is not required on repair work involving no change in

Table 4.3, Providence Urban Design Guidelines Signage Regulations.

Sign Type	Area (Sq. Feet)	Height (Feet)	Setback (Feet)	Projection over ROW (Feet)
Canopy	2'/1' of Bdg Frontage			
Freestanding	48 S.F.	18 Ft.		Unrestricted
Projecting	48 S.F.	30 Ft.	0	0
Roof	128 S.F.	12' Above Roof	0	0
Wall	Bdg Frontage			1.25 Ft.

Source: City of Providence Urban Design Guidelines.

style or material, surface repainting , traffic signage or street improvements. There is a turn around time of 30 days for applications needing review. Committee rulings are enforceable through the City's zoning codes.

#### 4.4 Downcity Implementation Plan

The Downcity Implementation Plan is a tool devised to effectively bring ideas from the Downcity

Plan to life, through specific action steps. Each action step is introduced, briefly described, key players noted and a time allotment for its completion is identified.

With the opening of the Providence Convention Center, expedient implementation of design concepts on Mathewson Street are essential. A positive experience on Mathewson Street will affect decisions for continued convention center events. The following analysis addresses only the particular action steps of the implementation plan that apply to existing needs

on Mathewson Street. Issues from the Downcity Implementation Plan that are addressed in this section are Circulation, Parking, Physical Improvement, Architecture and Design, Arts/Entertainment and Management.

#### *Circulation*

Circulation issues pertinent to Mathewson Street include the downtown network of one-way streets, signage, traffic flow, street right of way abandonment and public transportation. Issues of one way streets, street name signage and public transportation have already been resolved by the Downcity Task Force. Circulation improvements, through the use of distinct signage is still in need of completion. A downtown signage plan has been developed and signs that have already been designed need to be installed. Proposed signage has minimal verbiage and has a contemporary 'international' look.

Signage as it has been designed is not period accurate to character on Mathewson Street but it is still appropriate due to the needs of consistent visual cues for travelers throughout the Downtown. Signage of this form will not hamper the Mathewson Street look because the theme intent is to evoke an historic feel with contemporary uses.

The other circulation issue pertinent to Mathewson Street is that of street abandonment. This applies to the old Mathewson Street right of way between Fountain and Sabin Streets. Reacquisition of this parcel is important in the development of a convention center connection to Mathewson Street. At the present time, this parcel is predominantly part of the vehicular domain but it needs to be more a recognizable pedestrian gateway. This parcel is currently owned by the Providence Journal Bulletin but the City should regain control of it. Possibly the Journal Bulletin could be involved in a development

project by offering finances or maintenance in exchange for advertising and/or their own image enhancement. Convention Center control of the parcel is another option. An appropriate design for this parcel is proposed in Chapter Five.

#### *Parking*

Parking issues as related to Mathewson Street include ample short term parking, additional future parking and security. On-street parking has been designated free for two hours as prescribed by Duany's Downcity Plan. Parking in private lots along the Street is several dollars for a few hours. Mandatory rate reconfiguration of fees at 50 cents an hour for the first three hours with higher rates thereafter and/or a downtown merchant validation program are good short term solutions.

Design proposals within this study eliminate most access to parking from Mathewson Street in keeping with the 'A' street designation. Permanent parking solutions can be added through the eventual construction of new facilities funded by anticipated profits. Security issues can be addressed by increased police presence and the 'security host' concept presented in chapter Five.

#### *Physical Improvements*

Physical improvements on Mathewson Street are important to long term prosperity on the Street but incremental steps can be taken to meet future objectives. Implementation Plan actions address street lighting, building lighting and street trees. Pedestrian-scaled street lighting of a style conducive to street character is addressed in Chapter Five of this study. Building accent lighting and vacant building interior lighting, as suggested in the Downcity Plan, are



relatively easy to implement and are discussed in Chapter Five.

Due to the limited width of Mathewson Street planting efforts in this proposal are primarily focused on proposed Grace Park and the Parcel between Fountain Street and Sabin Street. While existing plantings are included as part of the proposal, narrow sidewalk widths inhibit new plantings of any substantial size.

The Implementation Plan makes specific recommendations pertaining to improvements on Mathewson Street. These improvements include a parcel specific master plan, lighting and design improvements complementary to that of Westminster Street, and the establishment of Grace Park. It is the objective of this study to provide an overall vision, guidelines and implementation phasing that will bring these recommendations to fruition on Mathewson Street.

#### *Architecture and Design Standards*

Architecture and design standards are another issue of great importance in the development of the Mathewson Street urban design theme. As has been noted throughout this study adherence to standards that preserve and enhance the downtown's architectural heritage and human scale are of great priority. Urban design guidelines, the established design review committee, and additional recommendations defined and described in this study lay appropriate ground work for architectural and design standards.

#### *Arts and Entertainment*

The arts and entertainment interests are instrumental to activities proposed on Mathewson Street. Current vacant building space, in-fill development proposals in this study, and the proposed program for Grace Park are intended to

provide space for the arts. Awareness of this intent must be raised to artist groups as well as the general public. Appropriate funding as described in Chapter Six and artist housing, studio and performance space proposals described in Chapter Five are both key parts to making the Mathewson Street Theme a success. Development of special events and free public performances are key elements in the promotion of a festival atmosphere within the Mathewson Street theme.

#### *Management*

Management issues surrounding Mathewson Street include a common retail business organization, sidewalk vending and sidewalk retail merchandising. A common retail business organization is essential to bring economic success to merchants on the Street. Shopping mall style marketing practices, retail mixing and long range planning must be adopted. There are a

number of ways to set up and arrange such an organization, some of which include a business management agency as defined in the Implementation Plan or control could be exercised by a private management company more similar to that of a suburban shopping mall. Potential development of the Providence Place Shopping Mall causes hesitation for any group to accept the of responsibility of a master leasing program. This issue is addressed more thoroughly in Chapter Six.

The Implementation Plan calls for enforcement of laws prohibiting illegal sidewalk vendors. This action assures a more staid environment and it is agreed that this code should be enforced. However sidewalk vending that meets standards of aesthetic compatibility and product quality run by organized entrepreneurs should be encouraged through a permitting process. A predetermined number of permits, sold by the City, should be displayed by the

purchasing vendor during sales hours. Street vendor presence would add to a festival atmosphere. Success for this has been proven in other places such as at Boston's Downtown Crossing. Product offerings and marketing would come under the jurisdiction of the business management agency previously described.

Outdoor sales events could be organized and regulated on a group basis. The Implementation Plan calls for controlling legislation to prohibit random sidewalk merchandising but it is recommended that, once in place, the managing agency be given the power to organize and control such events on a discretionary basis in conjunction with other organizations within the City (i.e. the Convention Center Authority or the Arts Council).



*The United Methodist Church*

## V - Design Theme

*A successful urban design theme incorporates a number of elements. In addition to physical design, other elements such as management, maintenance and new uses should also be part of the theme. Each of these elements can be integrated through a single overall vision for Mathewson Street. This chapter presents the vision for Mathewson Street and then provides a description of the Urban Design Theme in the following sequence. First, conceptual uses for specific areas of the study area are outlined. Then, development opportunities for the Mathewson Street Theme are discussed. Next, Street activities and programs are presented. Then, general physical design characteristics, such as materials and patterns are discussed. The final section notes recommended changes to the City's Urban Design Guidelines for specific parts of the Mathewson Street Theme.*

### 5.1 The Mathewson Street Vision

Mathewson Street possesses a great potential for diverse and lasting vitality. Existing historic character is the basis around which urban design and activity proposals can be oriented. A mix of uses should be accommodated within this setting of outstanding architectural quality and scale that would enhance opportunities for continued stability. The human experience on Mathewson Street would compare to a walk down an idealized Main Street. Pleasing aesthetic character on Mathewson Street is already stronger than in any shopping mall. Proper adjustment and accommodation of physical design and activity issues will raise the overall quality to a level of major attraction.

## 5.2 Conceptual Orientation

The Mathewson Street urban design theme utilizes a conceptual orientation scenario that is concerned with economic stability of businesses on the Street as well as the study areas proximity to other Downtown activities, such as other retail and entertainment. Sections of Mathewson Street have been oriented toward a particular use. While there are no strictly defined boundaries, different potential uses have naturally become apparent to different areas of the Street. Three conceptual orientations are proposed in this scenario; one serving the Convention Center, another serving retail markets and the third for downtown housing.

### *Convention Center Orientation*

Convention Center orientation is at the end of Mathewson Street near the Convention Center. Several

opportunities have presented themselves to serve convention activities. With the exception of the abandoned Mathewson Street right of way, the Convention Center is not well linked to any retail or entertainment areas. This presents an opportunity to draw convention delegates into the downtown area.

Mathewson Green is to be located on the old right of way as a gateway and the initial attraction to draw the conventioners to the Street. Building form, style and enticing activities will then draw convention delegates across Fountain Street. The Fountain Street Grill is the first potential stop for Conventioneers. Johnson and Wales' Dreyfuss Hall could be considered for use as a sports bar, theme restaurant, gourmet restaurant or some combination of these, in response to potential convention market demands. The vacant parcel across Mathewson Street, between Fountain and Washington Streets, as well as the parcel between The Fountain Street Grill and Dreyfuss Hall are ideal sites

for new services and retail such as boutiques, gift shops, graphic services and convenience stores.

#### *Retail Market Orientation*

Retail market orientation is around the central portion of Mathewson Street at the intersection of Westminster Street. Retail activity is appropriate here due to its proximity to shopping on Westminster Street and the financial district. The existing retail establishments in this area will be stabilized by new complimentary shops in the nearby vacant retail space on Mathewson Street.

#### *Downtown Housing Orientation*

Downtown housing is considered essential for economic stability. This study suggests the development of downtown housing in several buildings. The proposed area is near the intersection of Mathewson and Weybosset Streets. New housing in

this area has the advantage of convenient parking as well as close proximity to the security host headquarters. Buildings in this area have sufficient windows for good interior layout. It is suggested that new housing be mixed with office uses already in place to afford a smooth transition of use while also maintaining financial viability of the property. Potentials in this area present themselves as a good opportunity to develop artist loft and studio space. More specific details of this concept are presented in section 5.3.

### 5.3 Design/Development Opportunities

This section describes the complete physical image of the Mathewson Street Urban Design Theme. For ease of presentation in this document, the proposal has been divided into five sections (see Figure 5.1). Design elements, activities programs

and conceptual orientation from the previous section of this chapter have been considered. This image is developed in response to existing historic, cultural and physical aspects, stakeholder and market needs, and design principals drawn from existing documentation.

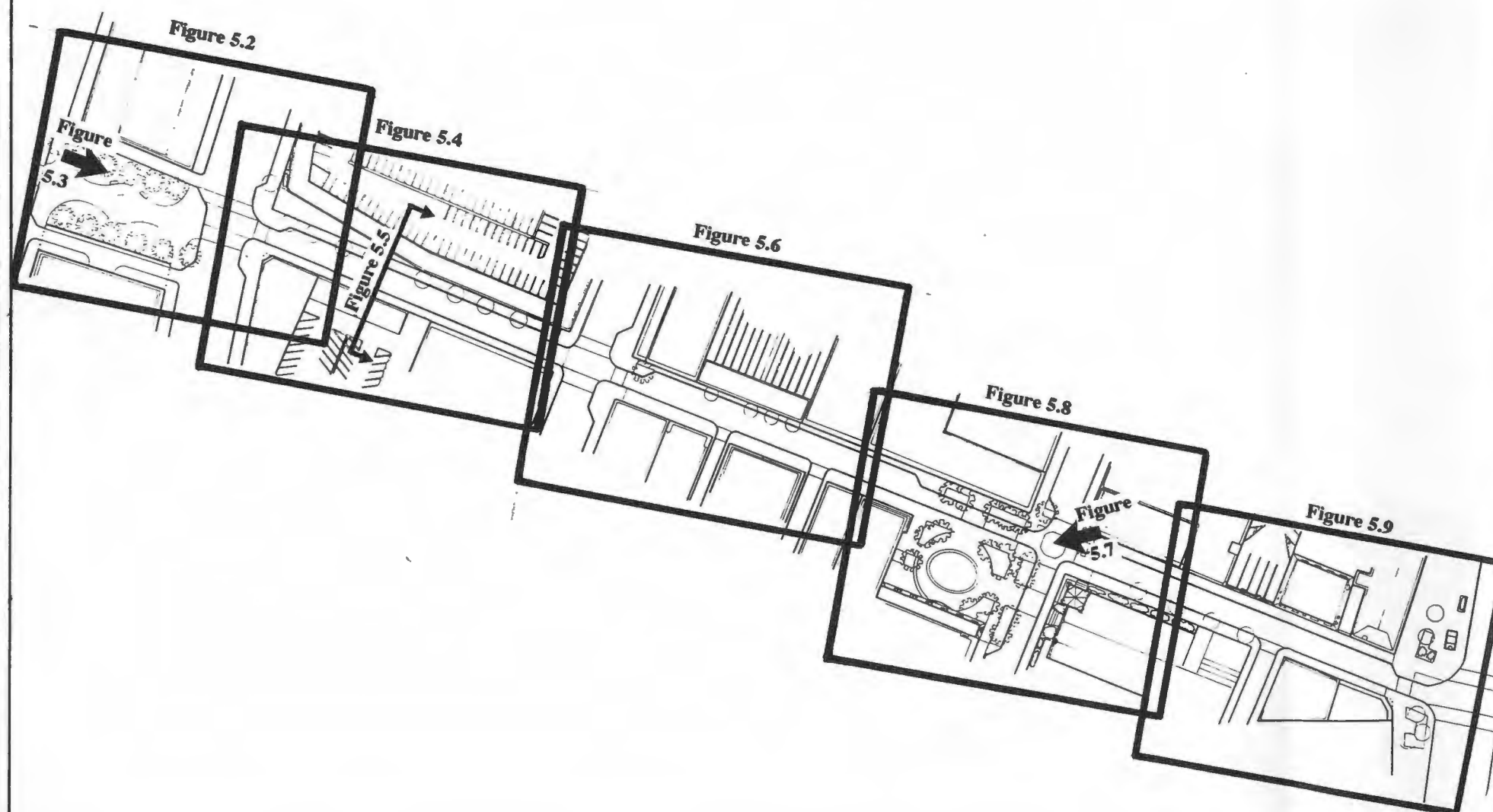
*Mathewson Green - The Convention Center Gateway*

A small passive green space is proposed on the abandoned Mathewson Street right of way (see Figure 5.2). Current use of the parcel is parking for the adjacent Providence Journal Bulletin and an underutilized U-turn connector between Sabin and Fountain Streets. Displacement of these uses is not seen as a major problem. Parking in the proximity of the Journal Bulletin is generally not a problem and those presently using the lot can be accommodated elsewhere. Those motorists on Sabin Street, wishing to reverse direction, need only to continue a few hundred feet further to LaSalle Square in order to turn around.

Designation of this parcel as a pedestrian openspace would establish a link between the Convention Center and the amenities of the historic downtown.

The main purpose of this planned green space is to attract the convention participants to Mathewson Street. For this reason, careful placement of plant materials and a simple design are important (see Figure 5.3). Columnar trees are to line both walls of the parcel to provide a lush effect while also framing views from the Convention Center to Mathewson Street. Tree placement near the curb line of both Sabin and Fountain Streets is intended to lead the eye of the viewer from inside the Convention Center as well as on the street to an offset view of Mathewson Street. Mathewson Green has the added advantage of being the nearest public green space to the Convention Center.

Hardy grasses or durable ground covers are recommended. A central flower bed or similar focal



Mathewson Street  
Theme Development

Streetscape Design  
Key

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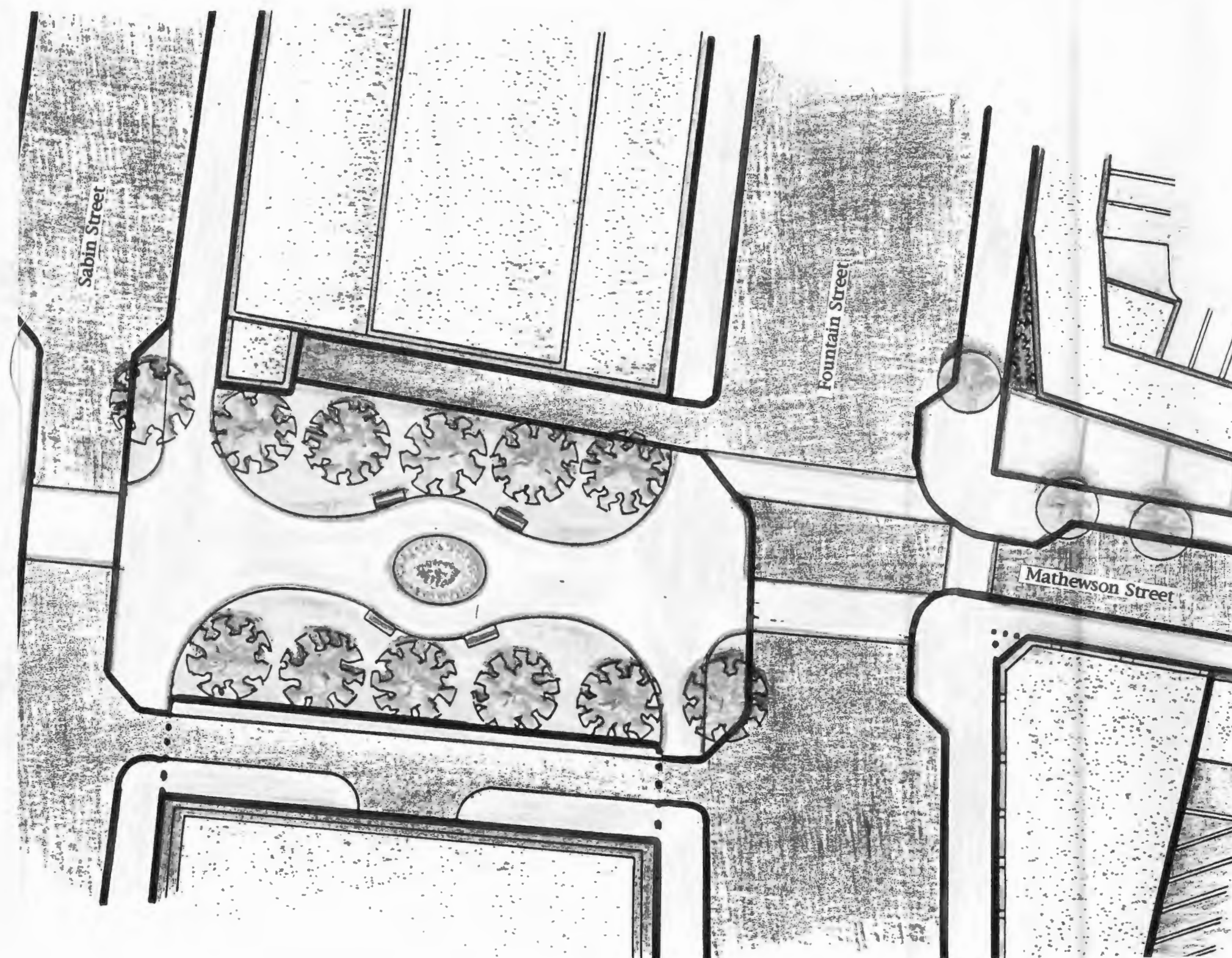
0 50 100 150

Scale 1" = 150'



Figure : 5.1





## Mathewson Street Theme Development

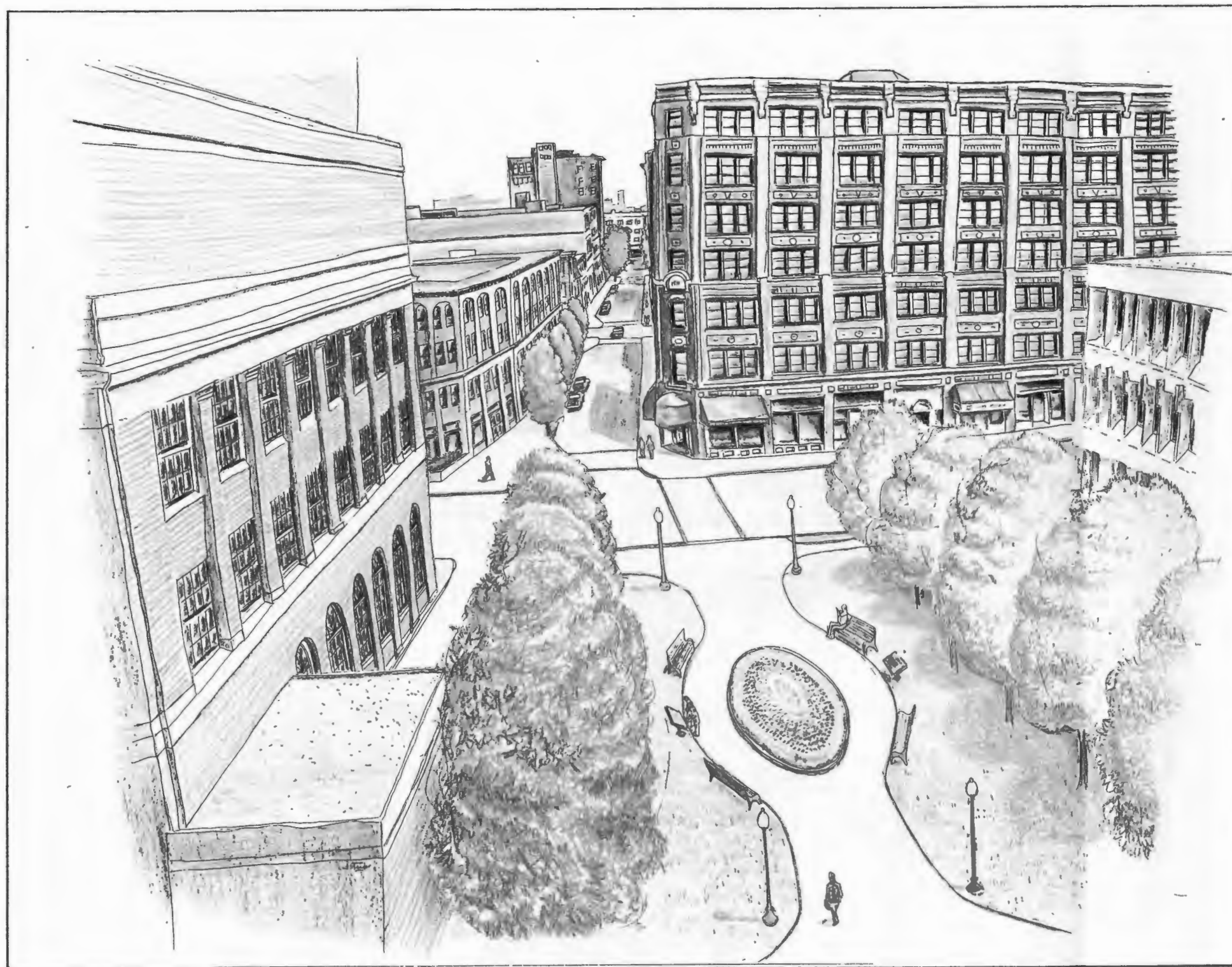
### Mathewson Green - Plan

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No Scale  
Figure : 5.2



**Mathewson Street  
Theme Development**

**Mathewson Green  
Looking Southeast**

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No Scale

Figure : 5.3

point is to be located in the center of the openspace. The paving pattern as specified in Section 5.4 is recommended. A simple but curvilinear layout is shown to suggest a relaxed but formal pattern of a Victorian garden. Amenities are limited to a few benches and an information kiosk to give the feeling of spaciousness and also to keep visitors informed of activities that await in the City. Both Sabin and Fountain Streets are narrowed, and have textured crosswalks, to provide greater pedestrian safety as well as a stronger pedestrian connection.

Three options exist for the development and maintenance of Mathewson Green. First, Convention Center success is dependent on a positive experience outside the facility. The Convention Center itself may be interested in adopting, developing and maintaining Mathewson Green in the same fashion the Biltmore has adopted the adjacent Park near Kennedy Plaza. This option would bring a quality design and maintenance

as well as security with little cost to the City or other stakeholders.

Second, the Providence Journal-Bulletin Company, which currently has control of the Site, may be interested in adopting the Green as a flagship representative of commerce in the downtown. In exchange for the development and maintenance of the Green, the company would have the opportunity for closer involvement with visitors to the City.

City control of Mathewson Green remains a last option. However stakeholders should be reminded that those in the closest proximity to the Green will be better able to concentrate efforts to maintain it.

*In-fill Opportunities Between Fountain and Washington Street.*

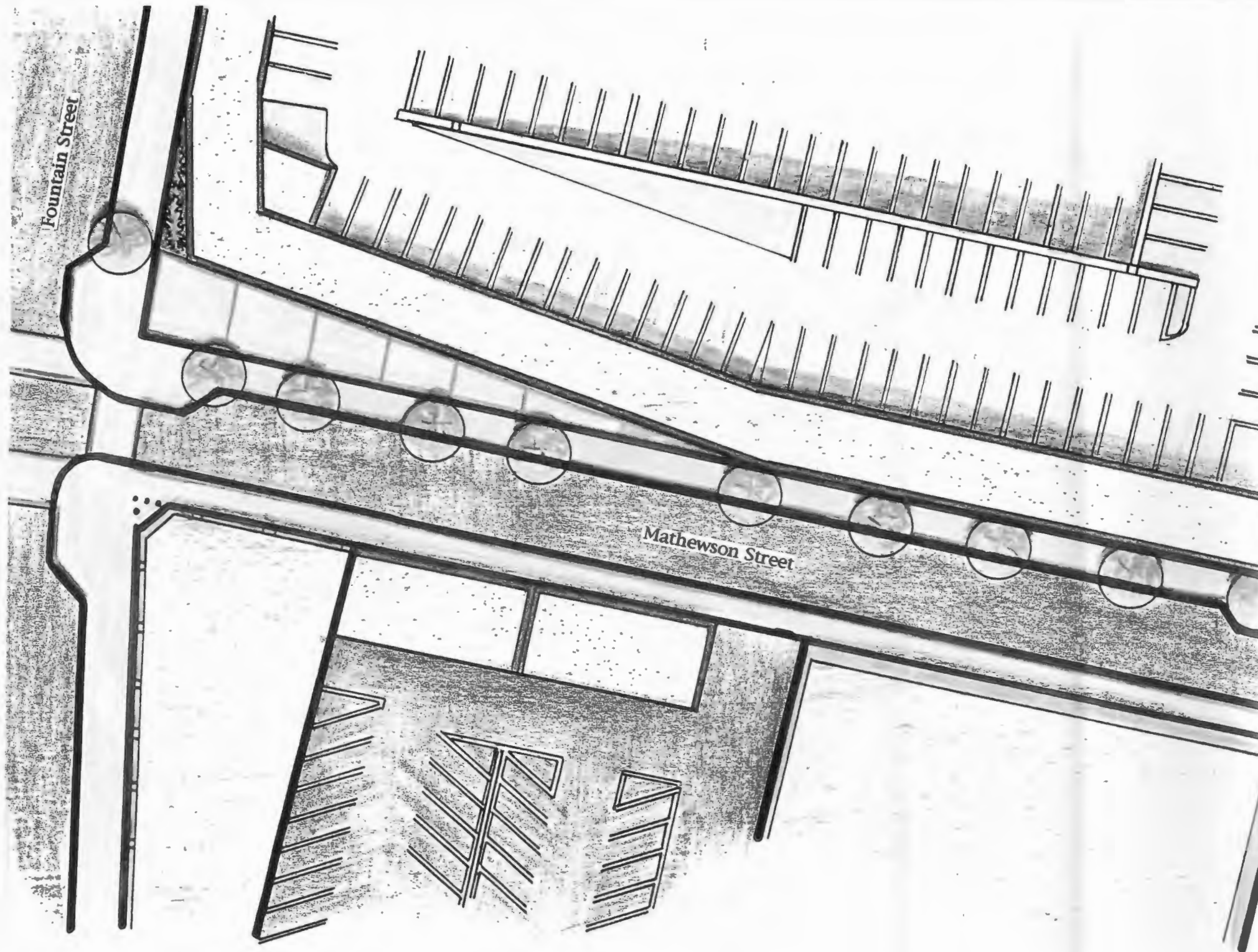
Due to the vacant parcel of land on the Northeast side of Mathewson Street there is a lack of enclosure. Although existent architecture is exceptional, general absence of streetwall in this area provides little sense of place. The construction of new buildings on each vacant parcel is recommended (see Figure 5.4). While the construction of any building consistent with the area's character would suffice, the use of liner buildings are proposed for reasons discussed in section 5.4.

Parking is suggested behind all three proposed liner buildings. Two smaller buildings with a common parking lot are shown on the small parcels between the Palmer Building and Dreyfuss Hall. The construction of two smaller buildings, rather than consolidation of both parcels into one project, may bring easier implementation and a more diverse streetscape.

The larger parcel across Mathewson Street is shown as a single liner building with a parking deck behind it. This parcel is in excess of 67,000 square feet and a number of options exist. The entire parcel could be a composition of a series of smaller liner buildings that function as separate entities, or a single larger structure with a varied facade. An internal parking structure has been proposed due to the reduction of parking resulting from curb line changes and new construction (see Figure 5.5). If future need dictated a variation from this proposal, the interior parcel could be utilized for other purposes, such as a playhouse, theater or a combination of uses.

The end of the proposed building near the Convention Center is pulled back from the street line. This is done to create a small plaza that widens the field of view from Mathewson Green, thereby enticing the interest of potential users. Plaza uses may include seating, plantings or outdoor sales.





**Mathewson Street  
Theme Development**

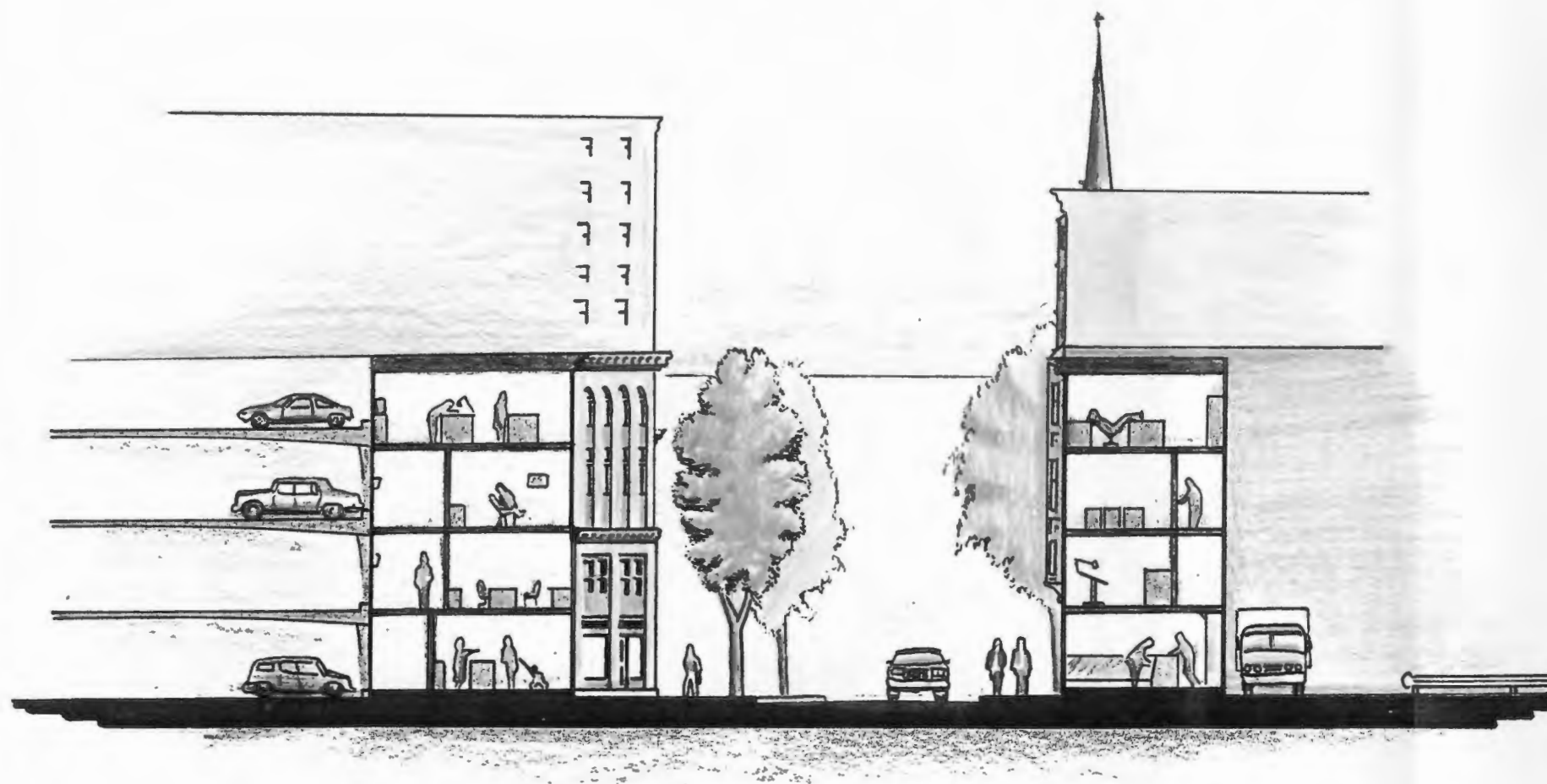
**Fountain to  
Washington Street**

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No Scale  
Figure : 5.4



**Mathewson Street  
Theme Development**

**Typical Liner  
Building Section**

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Scale; 1"=20'

Figure : 5.5

*In-fill and Renovation Between Washington and Westminster Street*

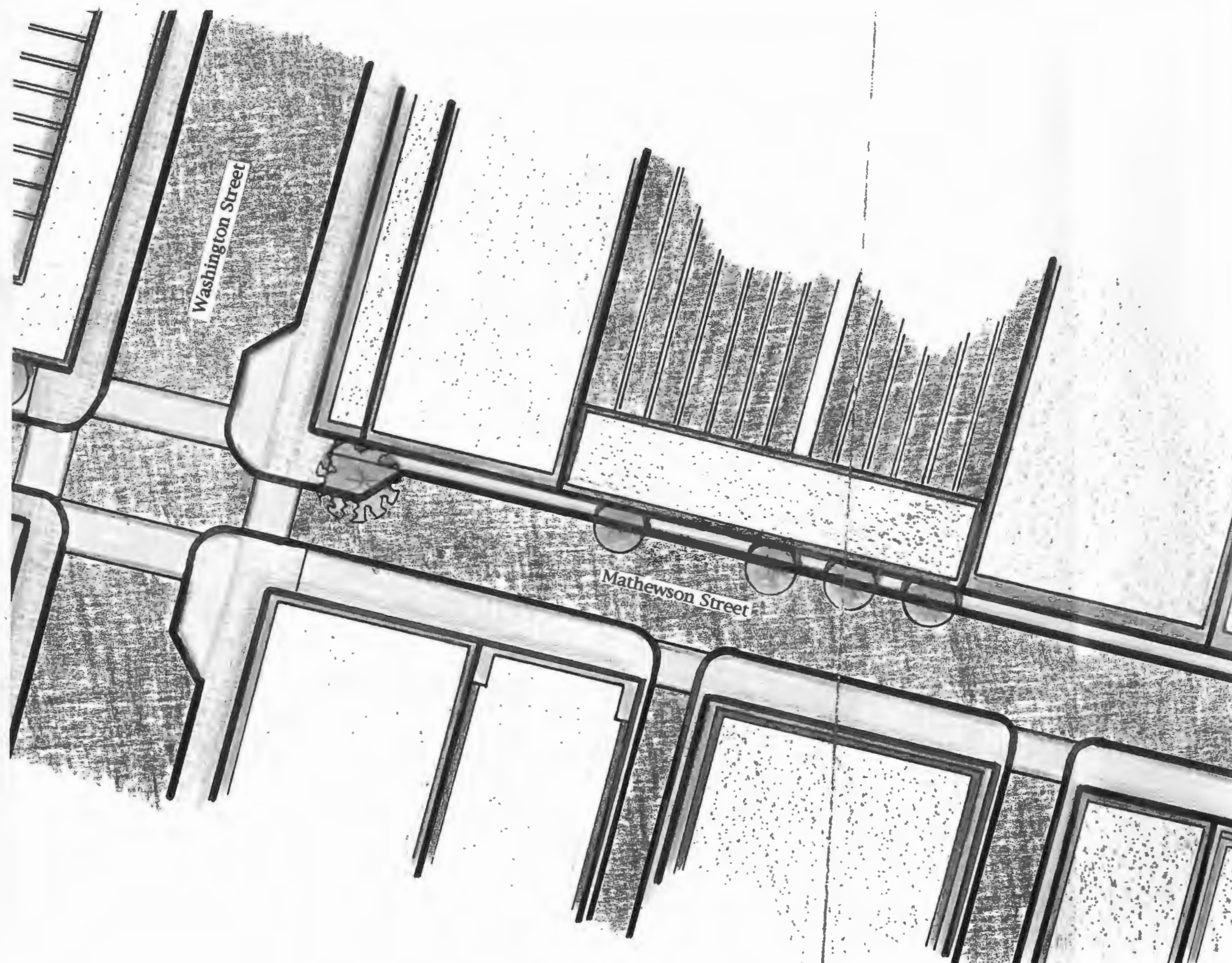
General recommendations for this portion of Mathewson Street include building renovations, efforts to attract new business and one in-fill development proposal (see Figure 5.6). Most renovations recommended are street level restoration from twentieth century changes, back to more original styles. In many cases, it is likely that original materials still exist under newer sheathing and renovations would be a relatively simple task. However some of the buildings in this area require more attention.

The Alexander Building (built in 1892), at 106 to 112 Mathewson Street, has been seriously altered through the removal of the third floor and the addition of sheathing over the original building materials. In its present form, this building is ill-proportioned and incorrectly textured. The Alexander

Building compromises the quality of the area's character. Encouragement of the building owner to uncover original materials as well as roof line alterations, such as the addition of a mansard or cornice, are strongly advised. Signage on the Alexander Building is also inappropriate with respect to the historic context.

Across Mathewson Street from the Alexander Building is the Rhode Island Security Building (built 1895) at 111 Mathewson Street. Upper floors of this building have fine Victorian details but the street level facade has been sheathed with dark colored brick in a windowless contemporary style unbecoming of the building or the surroundings. Past renovations to this building are seriously in need of correction.

Two adjacent parcels at 122-132 Mathewson Street are currently used for parking. This gap in the streetwall should be closed with the construction of a liner building that provides pedestrian access to the



**Mathewson Street  
Theme Development**

**Washington Street  
to Grace Park**

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No Scale  
Figure : 5.6



parking behind it. Vehicular access to the parking lot is from Clemence Street. A prototypical liner building in the study area is the Arnold Building (built in 1896) at 102 Mathewson Street.

Underutilized window display space, such as some in the Burrill Building, should be decorated through the use of a window display program similar to efforts elsewhere in the City. In the case of the Burrill Building, owned by Johnson and Wales, the University could develop changing displays of public interest pertinent to their own programs. Other excess window area could function as gallery space for artists or show goods and services offered by other nearby tenants. Window displays would require frequent updating and maintenance that could be administered by the proposed managing agency.

#### *Grace Park, An Active Urban Plaza*

Grace Park is to be the focal point of the Historic Downtown. It will be a place in Downtown where people will mingle and relax. Due to its limited size (about 6400 square feet) and strong enclosure, the Park will probably best function as a hard, paved surface with carefully located plantings. It is possible that one or two liner buildings will be built to further define the space and to provide an economic element to the Park.

The proposal shown in Figure 5.7 suggests one liner building, formal Victorian layout of the park and versatile overall design. This approach provides a maximum of exterior space while still maintaining commercial viability. The single liner building abuts Johnson and Wales' Bell Hall and provides a potential upper floor linkage to the Lederer Building. This liner building is three story's high with a mansard top floor and small cornice to allow maximum light into the



## Mathewson Street Theme Development

### Grace Park Looking Northwest

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SUMMER 1994

No Scale

Figure : 5.7

Park. Suggested ground floor uses include pedestrian attractions such as a cafe and book store. One proposed use for upper floor space is a new studio for WALE radio so that public address of their broadcasts can continue and so that this form of media may be integrated into future Park activities.

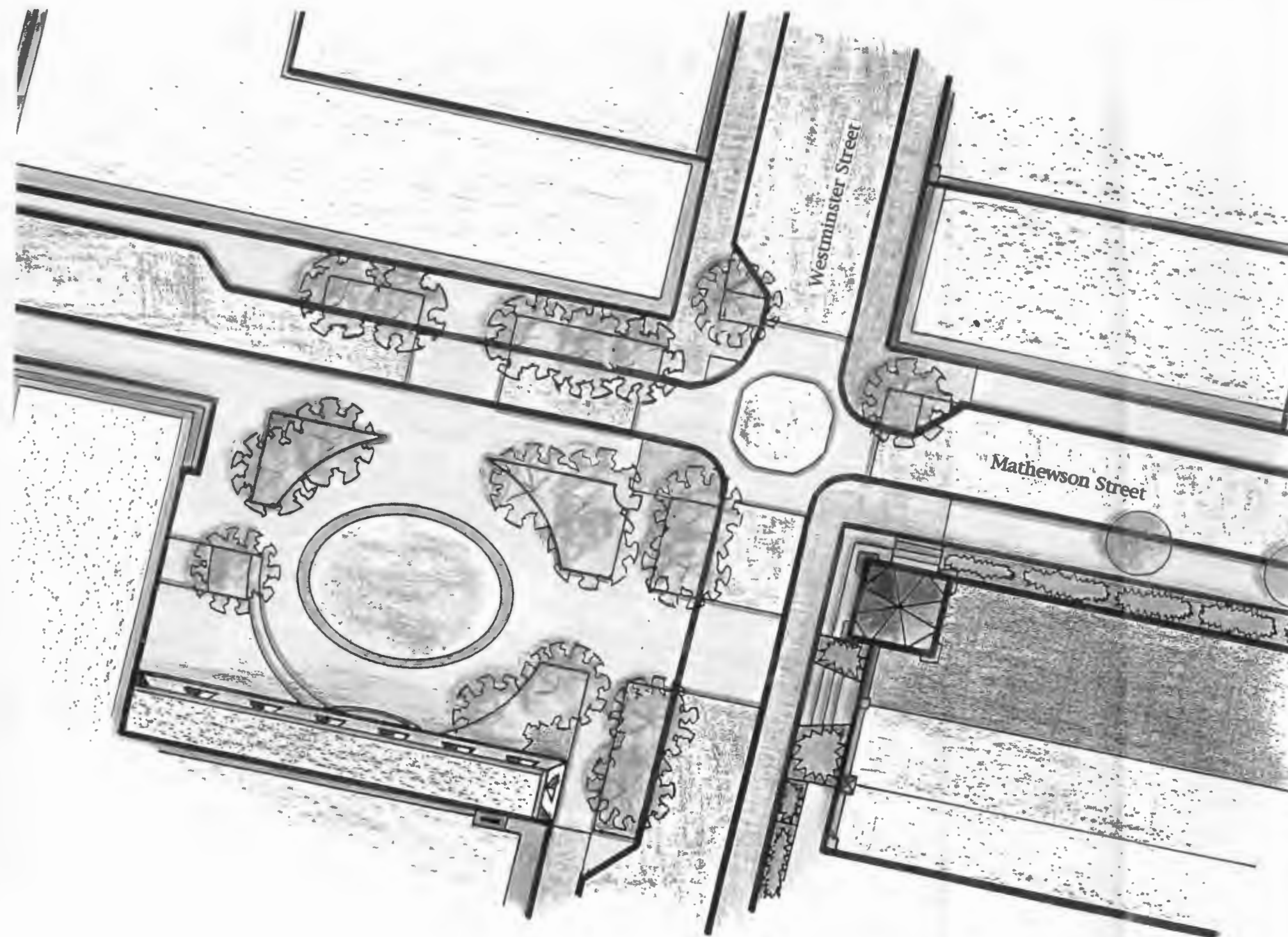
First floor access from the Lederer Building into the Park is also proposed. This will promote a free flow of pedestrians between retail and recreational uses. Alley space beside the Lederer Building has been incorporated into the Park but this design retains some service access to the building on this side. Truck loading areas in the immediate area, defined by mountable curbs, are located beside the Lederer Building and on the neck-down immediately across the Street.

Neck-downs are utilized at all possible curb lines along the Park to increase planted areas, and to establish strong pedestrian linkages. The use of

planted neck-downs in this manner increases the overall usable space in Grace Park by pushing the visual boundaries as far apart as possible. The elimination of parking in these areas also serves to strengthen the psychological bond toward more exclusive pedestrian use. Crosswalks to the park are wide, numerous and aligned with design elements in the Park (see Figure 5.8).

The Park should be oriented toward Grace Church much in the same fashion as a plaza in an old European city. Public seating is proposed along all planted edges. Movable cafe seating will be located at the back corner of the Park with some standing tables scattered around the rest of the paved area.

Paving materials proposed for the Park are a continuation of the sidewalk palette with predominant areas of two by two foot light colored concrete panels accented by glazed brick. The area at the enclosed corner of the park will be raised two steps, with a



**Mathewson Street  
Theme Development**

**Grace Park  
Plan**

A Study by James Taylor at The University  
of Rhode Island, Graduate Curriculum in  
Community Planning and Area Development

SUMMER 1994



No Scale  
Figure : 5.8

ramp beside the Lederer Building. This change in elevation is suggested in order to create a more defined space for the placement of cafe tables or to suit occasional needs as a stage.

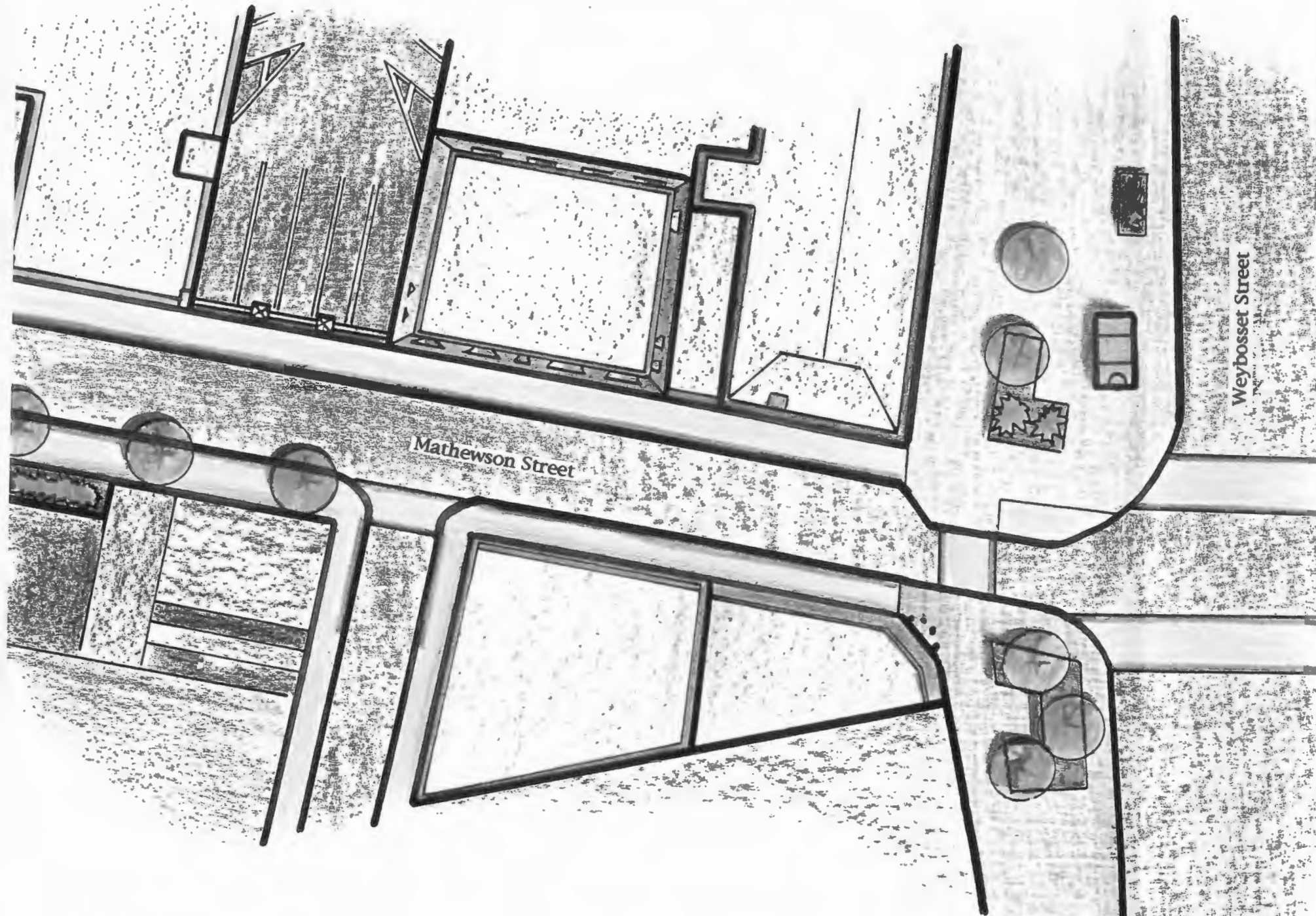
The central ellipse in the pavement design of the park is proposed as a unique piece of public art. The area is to be encircled with a glazed brick accent strip and two possible scenarios for its creation are suggested. The first is a permanent mosaic depicting a local map or historic scene possibly constructed of found objects, tile and/or pottery shards. The project could be commissioned to a local artist or developed as a RISD project. The second scenario is the use of a flat level surface with a mural painted on it. Occasionally the mural could be repainted with a different scene. This event could be the focus of a festival and the project would involve a local competition and/or RISD students. Either scenario is

intended to create a new landmark in Grace Park without eliminating the potential for daily use.

#### *New Uses Between Westminster and Weybosset Streets*

This area can be considered for new housing (see Figure 5.9). The Lapham Building (#158), Antiss-Manton Building (#182-188), the Winslow Building (183-191) and the Dyer Heirs Building (#211-215 Weybosset Street) have numerous windows, lending themselves for reuse as housing. Street level uses are to remain as retail and existing tenants on upper floors should also remain but creative solutions should be sought for renovation into apartments. There is the potential for occupancy of the Groundwerx Dance Company on the second floor of the Dyer Heirs Building and the remainder of the vacant space in the building could be used to house performance artists who wish to live near their rehearsal space. The top floor of the Antiss Manton Building has expansive





**Mathewson Street Theme Development**

**Westminster to Weybosset Street**

A Study by James Taylor at The University of Rhode Island, Graduate Curriculum in Community Planning and Area Development

SUMMER 1994



No Scale  
Figure : 5.9

windows and unobstructed floor space and is inviting to loft apartment development. The Winslow Building is on a corner lot and upper floors are currently vacant. The Lapham Building, while currently occupied by office uses, is tall and of good proportion. Eventual conversion to residential space will create a residential complex with commanding views of Downtown. These buildings could work together to create a unified residential area in the Downtown.

Residential parking and security needs are well accommodated in this area. Parking would be convenient through long term lease or deed agreements on the parcel between the Lapham and Antiss-Manton Buildings. Design proposals here are for a solid decorative wall with secured pedestrian street access along with increased overall lot security. Additional term parking can be established through agreements with the parking garage nearby, on Weybosset Street. Pedestrian safety would be good in

this area due to the convenient location of the information/security structure on Weybosset Street.

Changes suggested in this area are more use oriented than design related. Appropriate building facade restoration are recommended all along the Street and buildings in this area are either already restored, or require only minor attention. This streetscape proposal suggests few physical changes to this area beyond new sidewalk installation and decorative wall construction.

#### 5.4 General Physical Design Elements

Physical design should be a response to needs and activities on the Street. Physical elements of this urban design proposal are in response to needs of traffic control, sidewalk design, street amenities and building design characteristics. Physical design proposals in this study are oriented toward quality

and harmony with existing Street character, rather than a reflection of current trends.

#### *Traffic Control*

During the day Mathewson Street is crowded with vehicular and pedestrian traffic. This mix lends to an air of vitality that should continue. However, controls to enhance pedestrian safety need to be devised to welcome increased pedestrian activity. Curb lines should neck down to a single lane at all major intersections. This scenario also includes designated handicap spaces as well as standing zones for trucks so as not to disrupt a continuous traffic flow. While this proposal will eliminate some on street parking it will also slow traffic and result in an increase in pedestrian comfort.

Pedestrian street crossings should be clearly marked through the use of sidewalk materials at crosswalk locations. To some degree, sidewalk

material used in the street will have a rumble strip effect which would slow vehicular traffic. With full implementation, traffic congestion should not increase due to the relocation of most parking access to the surrounding 'B' streets. City parking signage should also help route traffic to 'B' streets.

#### *Sidewalks*

Sidewalk materials must be stylish and aesthetically complimentary while also durable. The selected material should also be easily repaired and replaced to exacting specifications after future city street work. It must also be kept in mind that Washington, Westminster, and Weybosset Streets all have brick sidewalk surfaces which all must be integrated into the Mathewson Street look.

For these reasons concrete panel with a one foot glazed brick paver strip at the curb line is suggested. The concrete to be used should be a light, consistently



achievable color with a warm hue. The overall intent is to easily produce the maximum amount of ambient warm light. This affect will subtly enhance the pedestrian street experience. The concrete pattern should be a two-foot by two-foot panel similar to that of the present sidewalk on Westminster Street in front of the proposed Grace Park site. This two-by-two proportion is of good human scale with much the same affect of a more expensive paver.

A one foot glazed brick accent strip is specified to further define the curb line and unify adjacent street sidewalk surfaces. A one foot width is appropriate due to the narrow sidewalks along Mathewson Street as well as the proportional difference with the abutting two-by-two concrete surfaces. A glazed brick is specified for reasons of increased durability as well as an upscale look.

This sidewalk surface design is recommended as a standard for all future sidewalk resurfacing projects

in the Downtown. A single specified sidewalk pattern, much like the already standardized City bench and light post, needs to be adopted. Existing renovated brick sidewalks that remain in good condition will compliment a good standard sidewalk surface design.

#### *Amenities*

The street furniture is proposed to be the same as the existing fixtures on Westminster Street. Bench and lamp post styles are complimentary to the historic character of Mathewson Street and use of this style reinforces a cohesive downtown character. Due to the limited sidewalk width, bench placement should be limited to designed openspace on the Street.

Lamp posts are to be placed along the Street at an interval appropriate for even lighting from 150 Watt, full spectrum, sodium vapor fixtures. Additional ambient light is provided by inconspicuously located up-lighting on first and second level building ledges

existent on most buildings on Mathewson Street. Up-lighting would be focused on interesting architectural elements while also not interfering with any upper floor night uses. Additional facade lighting could also be provided by locating fixtures on opposite sides of the Street. Building lighting is to be integrated as part of proposed facade restoration.

### *Buildings*

Many existing structures on Mathewson Street have undergone street level facade renovations that do not compliment the beauty of the rest of the structure. These renovations range from minor to extensive but all of them can be rectified. Proper research and building examination will indicate what type of work will yield historically correct results. Accent lighting and good signage are both part of this effort.

Appropriate renovations are a major part of the responsibility that must be met by Mathewson Street

building owners. Developing creative financing solutions to facilitate renovations is the responsibility of all stakeholders on Mathewson Street. Incentives for all to participate should be developed by the City and other supporting interests.

In-fill building construction is essential to the completion of an ideal environment on Mathewson Street. As implementation progresses, new building construction is an ideal opportunity custom fit new facilities with unmet need. First floor uses should be exclusive to pedestrian activities, as specified in the City's Urban Design Guidelines. New buildings should be constructed at street line and architectural styles should be complimentary but not overwhelming to adjacent existing structures. Where possible, banding and cornice lines should match those of adjacent buildings.

The use of Andreas Duany's liner building concept is highly encouraged for a number of reasons.

Due to total size, liner buildings are less costly than a building that covers the entire site. This raises the potential for its construction. Liner buildings are smaller in overall square footage. Mathewson Street already has a good stock of upper floor space and little more will be needed in the near future. While liner buildings fill in the street wall, they preserve space for parking behind them. Liner buildings should be oriented to serve the Street and be of versatile design such that additional interior square footage or a parking structure can be built behind the facade if future need evolves.

### 5.5 Street Services and Programs

The appropriate urban design response for Mathewson Street includes a number of services and programs that should be considered at the onset of

theme implementation. Early inclusion of these services and programs will be more efficient.

#### *Security and Pedestrian Service*

Security and safety on Mathewson Street are mentioned as a concern by all stakeholders involved. A security team is seen as an ideal solution yet staffing requirements and excessive police visibility are both drawbacks. The concept of a security host is suggested in an effort to provide tourist information and pedestrian aid as well as security. Johnson and Wales University has shown interest in such a program, using students in hospitality studies. Security hosts would be present on the Street to greet tourists, provide general information and they would be equipped with a radio to contact nearby police if needed. Johnson and Wales is interested in this program primarily for the safety of their students but the added responsibilities would not only enhance their

hospitality program but also provide a solution to one of the foremost concerns to all stakeholders. Operations would be based in the old 'Head House' on the corner of Mathewson and Weybosset Streets. This local landmark is already being renovated into an information booth and pedestrian aid station. Police support would be stationed in this facility and available as needed.

#### *Street Cleanliness*

General sanitation on the Street is another concern held by stakeholders. A clean Street will enhance its image and encourage vitality. It is suggested that new openspaces should be adopted and maintained by private entities, such as Johnson and Wales or area business. Sidewalks in front of each establishment should could be kept clean by the adjacent tenant. Terms of responsibility for leasor and leasee would be clearly explained in each lease. Peer

pressure for adherence to standards would be exerted by the theme management organization. Cleanliness standards could be enforced through ordinances, and fines could be issued if peer pressure fails.

Andreas Duany's Plan states the highest level of cleanliness must be maintained. Sidewalk cleanliness not only includes litter removal but regular cleaning of the sidewalk and building itself. In some cities, many service oriented chains use power washing equipment outside their establishments on a daily basis. This equipment is simple to operate and requires only a few minutes to complete the task. Local businesses could adopt similar cleanliness standards. This equipment could be administered by the management organization. Purchase of the equipment could be made with the assistance of the City, possibly through the Department of Public Works (DPW). Each merchant could be offered the responsibility of completing the task or pay a fee to an adjacent

merchant willing to take additional responsibility. These efforts would be supplemental to the existing DPW activities. A street care program would instill pride of place as well as provide a practical solution to the problem of cleanliness in the Downtown.

#### *Festivals and Featured Activities*

Most street activity will evolve as a result of retail activity. The design of open space on Mathewson Street is in support of passive pedestrian activities. The design intent is to provide rest and visual stimulation. This theme, as well as potential public interest, may inspire ongoing activities to attract people to Mathewson Street.

Street performances, art shows and holiday events or festivals should all be considered as possible activities in which all stakeholders should be involved. Performance and visual artist would be relied upon to provide entertainment. Shopkeepers would adjust

their hours accordingly and Johnson and Wales would provide hospitality. Street events would be coordinated with the Convention Center Authority to promote events to convention delegates.

The Mathewson Street Theme must consider a diversity of potential activities including, street performances, art shows, sidewalk sales, food festivals, banners design contests and art competitions. This diversity can be accommodated through the use of durable materials and versatile design of open space. Parking lanes as well as the entire Street can be closed as necessary to provide needed pedestrian space. Within this theme Mathewson Street has the potential to function as both a vital and viable Street on a daily basis as well as an ideal setting for festivals.

### 5.6 Urban Design Guideline Modifications

Installation of the physical elements of the Mathewson Street Urban Design Theme requires some modifications to the City's Urban Design Guidelines. Andreas Duany appropriately classifies Mathewson Street as an 'A' street due to the quality of existing architecture and current uses on the Street. The urban design theme is compatible with the 'A' street designation. There are alleys and/or side streets on either side of Mathewson Street that serve as supporting 'B' streets. Urban design guidelines are, mostly, appropriate to theme activities on Mathewson Street.

New use and existing building character preservation described in the urban design guidelines are ideally compatible. However, with respect to development and preservation concepts of the Mathewson Street theme some aspects of new

construction should be more carefully administered than current guidelines specify. All new construction on Mathewson Street should be limited in height to three to five stories in an effort to promote enclosure and human-scale while not competing with more substantial historic structures on the Street such as the Lederer Building, the Lapham Building and the Grace Church Steeple. An additional exception to this height limitation should be made with respect to the liner building(s) in Grace Park. A maximum building height of three stories would provide more daylight in the Park. An exception to the setback standard would be to construct a building with an angled facade at the Fountain Street end of the parcel on Mathewson Street across from Dreyfuss Hall. This concept will work as a visual funnel for pedestrians coming from the Convention Center.

## VI - Implementation, Financing, and Phasing

*The final element necessary to any plan is its implementation. This chapter considers existing conditions and cultural resources as well as stakeholders, design principals and the design proposal itself. Linking elements that bring a plan into reality concern: implementation that initiates action, fiscal resources that drive creation and phasing that chooses the path toward results. The creative outcomes of this study, are now as closely connected to actualization as possible by this author. Those who are more experienced with political interaction or finance may be aware of alternative methods. The steps to follow are to be taken by the stakeholders addressed in this study.*

### 6.1 Implementation

Each stakeholder group involved in the Mathewson Street theme development has unique potentials as well as needs. In many cases, potentials of one group are capable of fulfilling needs of another. End benefits to a given group can in turn be shared by all. This concept is important to the desire for a mix of uses. Stakeholders themselves are a part of this concept.

Clear organization of individual stakeholders is the first step toward inter-group coordination. A clearly defined group is self aware and contact within and from outside organizations is straightforward. All stakeholders in this case are either presently organized or taking action to strengthen themselves. This activity is strongly encouraged and its expediency is also urged.

While it may be felt that interaction between stakeholders may require discretion, no group should operate with, what is in this case, the misconception that knowledge is power. Free communication and information sharing will be essential to quickly and efficiently reach agreement. This study has shown that many stakeholders have similar concerns that can be better met with collective solutions. Communication conduits need to be developed between stakeholders.

### *Management*

Management issues are an important part of the Mathewson Street theme. Empowering some stakeholders to assist other stakeholders, tenant mixing and activity programming are but a few. A Mathewson Street Management Committee needs to be developed. The Committee could stand alone or be part of the City's proposed Downtown Management

District. This organization could be equipped to address management issues with input from Johnson and Wales College, Total Arts Providence and the Convention Center, as well as local businesses. Assistance from city agencies and guidelines would help coordinate, initiate and regulate public interest aspects.

Another management issue mentioned in Andreas Duany's plan is the formation of a master leasing program. A master leasing program is similar to the strategies of a shopping mall where tenant leases, marketing and future planning for all retail space is managed by a single group. This guides tenant mix and consolidates marketing power and improves overall efficiency. While this concept is more focused on retail aspects, this program could be expanded to include things such as, event planning, open space maintenance and adaptive reuse of buildings. One version of this scenario could be that a



major corporation acquire and collectively manage buildings, events and services as a single entity. This management concept would require great expenditure on the part of the corporation and it may change the mix of retail stores in the area. Corporate involvement may also be hampered by the potential development of Providence Place. Potential Providence Place markets could be attracted to downtown with relative ease and less development cost.

An alternative to total corporate control could be the use of the management committee described in the beginning of this section. The management committee would direct tenant mix, aesthetics and maintenance as well as non-retail concerns with input from all stakeholders. While this method would not require corporate management, it may be less efficient.

A positive marketing concept for downtown should be developed to contrast project proposals

requiring greater expenditures on public and private sectors such as The Providence Place Shopping Complex. Providence Place would require hundreds of millions of dollars in total investments from many players during this time of economic instability. Total investment of only a few million dollars could be expended in the downtown that would entail the adaptive reuse of historic structures. Lesser expenditures downtown, as opposed to the cost of new development elsewhere, would have much the same economic results while also preserving potentially historic structures on the Providence Place site as well as in the downtown. The potential for construction of Providence Place appears as a threat to some stakeholders and currently looms over willing investment by others in the Downtown.

Much of the effort needed to make this revitalization concept a reality is through a public support campaign promoted by some outgrowth of the

stakeholders. Popular reinforcement of this concept at the State level, promoted by both the citizenry and government officials, would also be necessary.

The Mathewson Street management committee should develop a mission statement that fully describes the intent for future uses and conditions. The statement should include design objectives, uses and elements that pertain to present and future street activity. This statement could be developed by the Downcity Task Force or some managing entity overseeing the Street. The City's Design Review Committee awareness of the mission statement would allow them to better weigh ramifications that may be set forth by future proposals. Eventually, similar mission statements could be developed for other streets in the Downtown.

#### *New Downtown Housing*

Stakeholders generally agree that housing is key to a successful Downtown revitalization. This can be exemplified by a comparison of nearby cities, those with a downtown housing element (i.e. Boston, Massachusetts) have much greater vitality than those without (i. e. Hartford, Connecticut).

Building owners are hesitant to make the initial investment in housing due to renovation costs and fear of a higher tax rate imposed on residential property. Andreas Duany has suggested loft style renovations to lower expenses but property owners are weary of a nontraditional approach. General consensus attained by this author has found positive interest in loft style apartments. Further research to find if a more definite favorable consensus exists for loft style housing is advised. There is also a concern that tax rates will rise on existing properties that are converted to housing. According to the Department of

Planning, this is a misconception and existing rates would not be affected. Information about housing preferences and taxation need to be promoted in order to encourage downtown housing conversions. It may be necessary for the City to execute a small scale demonstration project to initiate a new trend.

## 6.2 Financing

Current economics dictate creativity and efficiency when developing fiscal support for the enactment of a proposal. Financing, although minimal, is available for different aspects of the Mathewson Street theme from a variety of sources.

### *Street and Sidewalk Improvements*

Sidewalk improvements in this proposal, consisting of concrete with brick accent, is considered moderately priced by city planners, as compared to

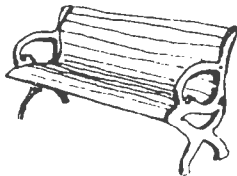
other designs. Typical sidewalk and street improvements are traditionally financed by the City. However current economics may dictate a creative combination of sources. A bond issue is one likely source for financing the improvements. It may also be possible to acquire some assistance from the Providence Plan. Research into this potential funding source is advised. It is likely that existing street tree planting programs could be utilized to provide proposed plantings on Mathewson Street.

Regular cleaning and maintenance of the street and sidewalk are as important as the initial improvements. Need for an efficient and ongoing program is absolute. While regular street maintenance responsibilities are to remain in the hands of the City, the sidewalk care program described in Chapter 5 is to be administered and financed by retail management. It is also possible that additional support may be necessary and negotiated with Johnson and Wales

University, possibly through the security host program discussed in Chapter 5.

### *Parks and Open Space*

Private development of open space and adopt-a-park programs shift financial burden away from the City and give the guardian of the park the opportunity to design and maintain open space near to them. Proposals for Grace Park have followed this trend and private ownership and/or development of the Park appears to be the best solution. Mathewson Green is a product of this study and the author has suggested similar private involvement alternatives in Chapter 5. Private involvement in the development of public openspace is seen in this report as an excellent solution.



### *Building Restoration*

Accurate, quality restoration of historic character is an important part of the Mathewson Street theme. Voluntary participation of property owners in the study area is the only alternative at the present time. Encouragement through the promotion of historic importance, simplified permitting and financing must be developed and well publicized.

A three point program should be developed to encourage quality restoration on Mathewson Street. First, the City has money available for renovations through a storefront loan program. Second, a one-stop permitting program has been suggested in Andreas Duany's Plan. Third, historic consultation should be readily available through the Providence Preservation Society or the City's Historic Preservation Planner. Together, these three elements should be packaged and aggressively promoted.

*Arts, Entertainment and Activities Programs*

Potential events and activities on Mathewson Street could take many forms and therefore a diversity of funding sources may be available. Some events can be planned with little or no extra expense (i.e. sidewalk sale/flea markets) while other events may be costly. Well coordinated activities may be able to combine several sources simultaneously. It is possible that art endowments at state and federal levels could be directed toward certain entertainment or performance elements of a larger event. Festivals and art fairs could also be underwritten by one or more sponsors.

The Convention Center is to provide some funding for aesthetic improvements in and around the facility. If the Center becomes involved in Mathewson Green, some of those funds may possibly be used on the Green. The City may also be able to provide some services or funding through agencies such as the Parks

Department. Each of these and other sources should be thoroughly researched, compiled and coordinated through the management committee.

*Stakeholder Cooperatives*

At the present time, the relationship of stakeholders to one another is not clear. Organizational structure and types of responsibility must be defined in order to determine development and financing scenarios. Open communication and cooperation will be necessary for the development of financial strength that will bring the Mathewson Street theme into reality. This coordination component should be built in to newly formed alliances.

Currently, businesses and city agencies feel that a downtown management district will become a reality. If this is the case considerable financial control should be in their hands. Total Arts Providence is in its infancy. Development of arts

funding resources on Mathewson Street needs to be incorporated with downtown management. Johnson and Wales' concern and involvement in city improvement is commendable. While the nonprofit component of their institution removes some of their holdings from the tax roles, the University offers services and stability to the downtown. Further Johnson and Wales inclusion into cooperative activities would prove a valuable asset. Good organization will determine how these entities will interact within the Mathewson Street theme.

Stakeholders must organize and focus efforts toward citywide recognition as a 'neighborhood' in addition to merely making aesthetic improvements. Neighborhood status will bring more influence to the Downtown in matters of political decision making. A campaign to raise awareness of the need for neighborhood status will make the Downtown a significant resource. A strong point to stress in theme

development would be to capitalize on the minimal input required to perfect the ideal urban environment, rich in character, with a natural propensity for vitality that could never be built anew.

### 6.3 Developmental Phasing

Incremental construction and development of the Mathewson Street theme is the most likely method to achieve full implementation. To determine the best phasing scenario, time, budget and most immediate return for investment must be examined.

#### *Phase I -Grace Park and Sidewalk Improvements*

Momentum for the construction of Grace Park has already begun and the development of this parcel will drastically improve downtown character. Agreements have been made with property owners and the City is in the process of preparing the site.

Major expenses for developing the Park are to be covered by a private developer. For these reasons, Grace Park development is seen as the first implementation phase of the Mathewson Street theme.

Sidewalk improvements on Mathewson Street are also part of this phase including paving, new curb lines and lighting. Installation of proposed sidewalks and amenities is the single cohesive element that aesthetically connects the entire Street. Improvements initiated by the City would inspire the private sector to become involved in improvement projects on their own property. The new paving pattern with accent strip would tie the paving designs of Washington, Westminster and Weybosset Streets together. The entire downtown stands to immediately benefit from sidewalk improvements. As soon as pavement patterns on downtown streets can be unified, basic aesthetic perceptions of the downtown will begin to improve. Paving patterns and materials in both the Park and on

the sidewalk are similar and require the same methods for installation. The grouping of material purchases and construction contracting are financially prudent.

Other elements of phase I implementation include Andreas Duany's suggestion of the night lighting of the upper vacant floors of buildings on Mathewson Street. This activity will further the improvement of the urban night experience in conjunction with new sidewalk lighting. These elements will set a safe and aesthetically pleasing stage for the anticipated increase in night activity.

Phase I is also where cooperation between stakeholders must be initiated. While much of the physical activity of this stage is in the hands of the City or developers who have a parcel specific goal, other players can take this time to organize for effective future action. Stakeholders can communicate and develop strategies to be used in later phases of theme development. Business, artisan and academic

interests can develop and define their roles through regular and increasing dialogue. Initial encouragement may be necessary by the City or some strongly motivated neutral party.

*Phase II - Mathewson Green*

Right of way reclamation and development of Mathewson Green is seen as the second priority. The open space development scenario, which involves City initiation with private development, can follow much the same pattern as Grace Park. Acquisition and development of this parcel may be an easier task than Grace Park due to past designation as a right of way.

The Convention Center has already opened, hence, there is urgency in the completion of Mathewson Green. Establishment of this open space will connect the downtown to the Convention Center. The accommodation of conventioners will bring new revenue into the downtown.

*Phase III - In-fill and Renovations*

While phases I and II are underway, it is hoped that Mathewson Street property owners have taken the initiative to undertake renovation and to improve signage. Establishment of the general framework for improvements in phases I and II are likely to be the initiative for public support. Some hesitation of private participation may linger until after public action. The basis for phase III (meetings, proposals and financial arrangements) have already begun in phase I. Individual efforts for renovation and construction can occur at any time and property owners should be encouraged to do so. Independent renovation and construction projects will complete the Street Theme.

Stakeholders are already becoming more organized so that they can direct their efforts more efficiently. Organizational development is an ongoing process. As organizational structures materialize,



methods of sequencing as well as financing and implementation will become clearer.

Development of housing in the downtown is not expected until phase III. While downtown housing is seen as a key element in this process, it may be necessary to first install basic elements of the Street Theme. With the enhancement of the local urban environment, market demand for housing and developer confidence are likely to improve. In earlier phases, stakeholders needs and relationships have been more clearly defined. This, in turn, will clarify the best course of action for those interested in developing housing in downtown.



*The C.G. Arnold Building*

## VII - Conclusion

There is a need to establish an urban design theme on Mathewson Street. Mathewson Street is a potentially excellent pedestrian connector which bisects Providence's historic downtown. Unique character and scale of existing buildings provide the potential for an ideal urban experience. While several possible markets already exist, the opening of The Providence Convention Center presents a new market that will require a firm connection to the downtown and a lasting positive urban impression of the City. Mathewson Street has the location and aesthetics to fulfill these needs. Stakeholders have the ability to make it happen.

### *Physical Elements*

Existing structures already form an excellent framework for the Mathewson Street theme. Each

building within the study area is highly individualized yet all are consistent in style and proportion. Form, massing and height-to-width-ratios are all excellent. Irregularities and interruptions in the urban fabric are addressed in this study. The urban experience in both its general form and fine detail along with its potential to be improved upon are outstanding. Building vacancy and the current opportunities to attract new users indicate that the time to act is now. Historic and cultural resources driven by desires of concerned stakeholders can bring a successful theme into reality.

The Mathewson Street Theme Development Study has followed a logical course in the creation of an identity as well as a vision for a busy street in Providence's historic downtown. Proposed elements are intended to enhance the existing character without following a current trend that is in a style that may go out of style. The

simplistic quality that accentuates the existing historic context.

#### *Cultural Elements*

This study identified the existing cultural resources. These include not only the well preserved architectural heritage but also unique characteristics of those who interact within the downtown on a daily basis. Artists, both performance and visual, are a solid part of Providence's culture. For Providence, the arts could be thought of as an urban anchor of the 1990's. With proper support, they can attract many people into the downtown.

Academic institutions in Providence represents economic stability at corporate and personal levels. Colleges and universities can be more resistant to economic stress than private developers. Academic institutions also tend to be more entrepreneurial when involved in image enhancement and development

scenarios. The Student body presence provides a stable market for local goods and services.

Other stakeholders identified in this study include artisan and academic populations as well as historic interests, businesses, city agencies and quasi-public organizations. Historic interests in the City of Providence can guide the progress of development with their knowledge and concerns related to the City's past. Small business and property owners on Mathewson Street are a major strength and driving force that, through dialogue, can unify and direct new changes. City agencies and quasi-public organizations are often the initiators that coordinate and guide new action. In this study, commonalties, differences, strengths and weaknesses of each stakeholder were discussed. It has been found that strengths and needs of each stakeholder can be unified within the theme to serve one another.

This study considered the potential markets that can support the theme proposal. The notion of the traditional downtown shopping trip has been replaced by the convenience of the regional shopping mall. Urban economic stability must depend on a mix of leisure, entertainment, and the arts with supporting retail that may have a specific focus, such as high-end, specialty or outlet shopping. Support for the Mathewson Street area can also be expected from student and convention markets. However, specific market expectations have not been fully explored in this study and further research would more accurately define a target market.

### *Implementation*

As a final measure, the theme was linked with reality through an outline of implementation concerns, funding sources and a phasing scenario. The governmental agencies within City of Providence are

unable to single-handedly install a Mathewson Street Theme. Stakeholder involvement in the development and maintenance of such a concept is the only alternative not only for economic reasons but also for the accurate satisfaction of user need. Theme success requires the development and continuance of stakeholder dialogue. Discussion and compromise is the best way to bring success.

Current economics dictates creativity in the procurement of financial sources. Funding for much of the proposed change exists, but finding it as well as its use must be innovative as well as efficient. An entrepreneurial attitude will be necessary for those who wish to bring success. Experienced individuals may have better knowledge of alternative methods and procedures but these suggestions demonstrate realistic possibilities.

Development of the Theme has been phased. This plots the course of action and eliminates the potential of being overwhelmed at the prospect of such an undertaking. Some of the physical elements of the first phase are already underway. Nonphysical elements of the first phase, some of which are also already initiated, are necessary to direct activities of the latter phases. The second phase is timely in that it draws in the participation of the Convention Center as it begins to gain importance in the City. The third phase involves individual participation in theme completion. The final phase is likely to take the longest and will only add to the positive results of the first two phases. The result is a complete package that encompasses existing resources, current needs, responsive design.

The future holds new opportunities for Mathewson Street and the historic downtown. Long underutilized and now historic elements await a

creative reuse. Strong cultural resources in the City of Providence are in need of promotion and a place to be experienced. Together, the place and the activity can bring new success. This study connects them both in a way that is adaptable to the future.



*Grace Church Steeple*

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Note: All interviews conducted in Providence, RI, in person, by the author on the date(s) shown.

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